

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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TARGET—MIKE SHAYNE

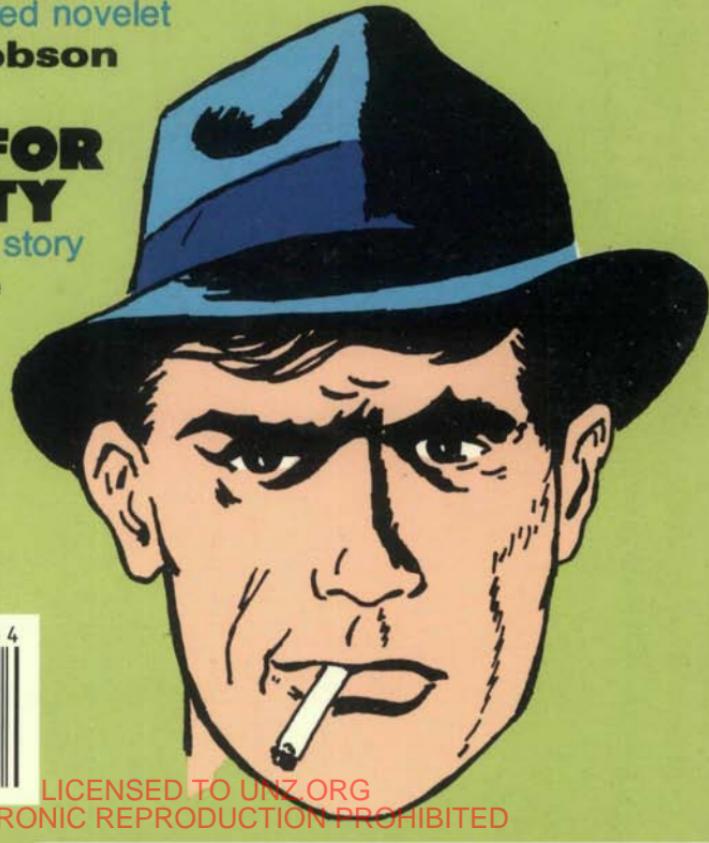
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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1977
VOL. 40, NO. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

TARGET—MIKE SHAYNE

By BRETT HALLIDAY

The Miami DAILY NEWS had the \$5,000,000 libel suit well in hand until star defense witness Myra Rainey turned up missing. Mike Shayne was called in to run her down, but his investigation was stymied at the start when Myra's roommate was murdered almost before his eyes. Then the Miami redhead discovered that he had the hit man on his tail 2 to 47

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TARGET—MIKE SHAYNE

Everybody involved in the criminal libel suit wants missing witness Myra Rainey, including the Miami redhead. But the going doesn't get really rough until Myra's roommate is murdered in her home.

by BRETT HALLIDAY

SHAYNE HAD JUST PULLED his Buick to a stop in front of the old pine mansion when the shots blasted the quiet of deepening twilight on the palm arcaded street. There were two of them, a couple of seconds apart, followed by a wildly discordant chorus of birdlife already nested in for the night to come.

But no human sounds followed their shattering impact. No shouts, no screams, no moans.

The detective's right hand slipped inside his jacket to grip the butt of the big Colt .45 in his shoulder rig. He sat there, waiting, as the second hand on

the dashboard clock made two full circuits of the illuminated dial.

Still nothing. He was in the very oldest part of Miami, where fine antiquated houses were all but masked from the street by the jungle growth of tropical foliage that had grown up in the near-century since they were built. But there were houses, however widely separated, in Coconut Grove, and surely, he thought, there should be some audible or visible reaction to the twin detonations that had shattered the twilight quiet.

But there was none he could hear or see. Even the birds

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ceased their clatter when the shots' echoes faded and were still.

Mike Shayne got out of his car and closed the door silently behind him. With his right hand hovering close to the heavy automatic, he crossed the street slowly and walked up a brief gravel driveway, largely overgrown with grass that served to muffle his footfalls.

It led past the large house on his right, through whose windows no light glowed, widened into a turnaround parking area at the rear of the dwelling, went on some forty feet to a former coachhouse-garage that had been converted into a small out-residence. There lived Cathy Whiting, the young woman he had driven out to see.

Two cars were side by side in the parking area—a three-year-old Pinto and a grey Mercedes that looked new. The redhead halted his progress long enough to lay a hand on the radiators of both vehicles. They were both warm, but not unreasonably so for the temperature, which lingered in the low seventies.

The redhead detective judged that the shots had come from the small separate dwelling that was his destination. He had set up the interview via telephone from his office that

afternoon, after considerable research had rewarded him with the knowledge that Cathy Whiting was the apartment mate of Myra Rainey, the young woman whose whereabouts Shayne was seeking.

"I don't know what I can tell you," Cathy Whiting had said over her office phone, "but come on out about seven if you think it might help you. I'm worried about Myra, too."

So here Shayne was, on the dot, to be greeted by the sounds of gunfire. He studied the smaller house. Somewhere, in its interior, a dim light glowed—too dim to create interior visibility through the windows. The front door was shut.

Shayne drew his automatic and put thumb to the safety catch before crossing the turnaround area. The unnatural stillness, following the double eruption of the shots, caused the hackles at the nape of his neck to stiffen. Then, silent as a large redhead cat, the detective slid swiftly toward the rail-less porch that fronted the small dwelling.

Taking a deep breath, he punched the doorbell.

The twilight stillness was again shattered without warning after a brief period of silence. A window beside the door was smashed abruptly and the barrel of a gun was thrust

through it, pointed at the detective and fired twice more.

The flashes all but blinded him, the shots themselves were deafening at such close range that he could feel the draft created by the bullets themselves. Had not the infinitesimal time-gap between the breaking of the window pane and the shots been sufficient for Mike Shayne to plunge face downward on the porch floor, he would have had his head blown off.

He lay prone, feigning death or unconsciousness, then inched himself over with infinite care to cover the front door should his would-be assassin emerge. By the time he was sitting upright, a door slammed at the rear of the little house and, casting caution aside, Shayne scrambled to his feet and circled the out-dwelling, automatic at the ready . . .

. . . only to stumble into a barbecue pit in the back yard that caused him to fall to his hands and knees.

This time, the door slam sounded from the front of the house, followed by the thud of sprinting footsteps on the gravel of the parking area. Realizing he had been effectively flummoxed, the redhead completed his circuit of the little house in pursuit.

A car motor roared to life as

he raced past a brick chimney. By the time he regained a view of the lot, the Mercedes was taking the turn into the driveway on two wheels with rubber in screaming protest.

Mike Shayne did not send a bullet after it. The chance of scoring a tire-hit on a receding object in motion in that dim light was about one in two million. He went on around to the front door, which now hung open, and walked in.

Cathy Whiting—Shayne judged it was she by the C.W. monogram on the breast pocket of the lavender sports shirt which contrasted pleasantly, even in the semi-gloom of the house interior, with her chrome yellow shorts—lay on her back in the little living room. What had been her face was a pudding of blood and bone and brains and hair and shredded flesh.

From a framed photograph on a table beside the small sofa, Cathy Whiting had been a very attractive young woman. In the picture, she stood with an arm around an exceedingly comely brunette against an outdoor background. The brunette Shayne recognized from other photographs he had seen as Myra Rainey.

With a sigh, he pulled out a handkerchief after holstering his handgun, picked up the

telephone and dialed Homicide. Then he got out of there and walked back to his car through the near-night.

As he did so, he received an answer to one factor that had especially puzzled him—the lack of any reaction to the sounds of the shots, apart from the birds in the trees. The over-and-undergrowth of tropical vegetation in this oldest part of the city was so dense that it must have blanketed the detonations.

The redhead had heard the shots because he was in front of the old house, with a clear acoustical alley. But across the street was a lot, vacant except for the all-encroaching palms and palmettoes.

Mike Shayne did not linger to greet the police, although he heard the faint whine of a siren as he drove eastward toward South Bayshore Drive. He had no desire to be put through even a cursory examination at this point in a case where things were evidently hotting up.

The redhead had been called into it less than twenty-four hours earlier, although the case itself was almost a year old. Only within the span of the last two days, however, had it erupted into possible criminal action, with the disappearance, voluntary or compulsory, of Myra Rainey.

II

TIM ROURKE looking as usual like a famine victim, awaited the detective in their regular rear booth at The Beef House. As Shayne took the seat opposite, the star reporter for the Miami *Daily News* looked up from his half-empty boiler-maker with an expression that combined hope with acceptance of the worst.

"Well . . . ?" he said.

"Well . . . nothing."

"Whiting wouldn't talk?"

"Whiting *couldn't* talk," the redhead replied. "She was shot dead as I pulled up in front of her place."

"I don't believe it! They wouldn't—" Rourke halted abruptly, reached for his drink.

"Somebody did."

"Who?" The reporter put his glass down empty.

"I didn't get a good look at him. It was getting dark out there."

"Murder!" It was an exclamation although Rourke's voice was a bare whisper. Then, "I never thought they'd go this far. But why kill Cathy Whiting? How could she hurt them? She's not even involved."

The redhead said, "It's just possible Whiting knew where Myra Rainey is—and your friends found out that she knew."

"But she told you over the

phone she had no idea," the reporter protested.

"That's what she told me, Tim. Which means either she lied or she found out afterward."

"But how . . . ?"

"Tim, I hope you're not this stupid when you're on a story. Try maybe Myra phoned her."

"And then told whoever killed her? Come on, Mike."

"Suppose," said Shayne, "her call was heard. There are such things as wire taps, you know. But hadn't you better report to your principals?"

"You're damn right. Where'll you be, Mike?" After draining his glass to the dregs, the reporter stood up, lean and lank as a beanpole.

"Right here. I'm hungry."

"You'll hear from us. And don't take off without leaving a message with Pat at the bar."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Shayne replied. "Give my regards to Carl Dirkson and the kingpin."

After ordering, Shayne wrapped a fist around a double Martell on the rocks and tugging at an earlobe, considered the case on which he had so recently been hired. Thanks to his close friendship with Rourke, he had known about it ever since the newsman's original story appeared in the paper that employed him.

It was the last installment of an eight-part exposé of corruption in the Miami area, centering on the building and loan industries that had sparked the problem. It had pilloried the practices of developer, Carl Meadows, revealing him as a builder of shoddy houses, as a flagrant rigger of stock in his own corporations, as a landlord capable of loan-sharking his tenants when they had the misfortune to fall behind in their rents, as a consorter with shady underworld characters in shady resorts and, finally, as a cruel and immoral individual in private life who had left a wake of human wreckage behind him.

There had been talk of a Pulitzer for Rourke when the series appeared—talk which was quickly silenced when Meadows, through his attorney, Allen MacRae, slapped a five-million-dollar suit for criminal libel on the *News*, citing publisher Roy Latimer, editor Carl Dirkson and by-lined reporter Tim Rourke as co-defendants.

Although Rourke was known to take both a drink and a woman off the job, on it he was a scrupulously honest, careful and gifted journalist with vast experience and intimate knowledge of Miami, Miami Beach and all of surrounding Dade County. Aware of this, like Tim himself, his co-defendants were

not especially worried over the lawsuit throughout its preliminary stages and postponements...

...until, only thirty-six hours earlier, they learned that Myra Rainey, Meadows' former secretary and chief defense witness, had dropped out of sight.

It was shortly after this that Mike Shayne was invited into the case. Dirkson and Tim Rourke had prevailed upon the publisher to bypass the police for the time being, on the grounds that the opposition might conceivably be unconnected with Myra's disappearance and that to call in the police would be to inform them of the fact.

The redhead had gone along with this reasoning until he heard the shots and found Cathy Whiting's body in the house both girls had shared. He had called in Chief Will Gentry's men in blue because, with Cathy's murder, all reason for pretense was gone.

If the other side was not behind the killing, they would inevitably learn about it, and about the dead girl's roommate's disappearance in short order.

When his food arrived—a 24-ounce top sirloin, charcoal black outside and blood rare within, accompanied by a baked

potato adrip with butter, onion rings, bacon, mushroom caps, French rolls and a chef's salad—Shayne ate it thoughtfully, considering what options were open to him for further investigation.

The obvious move would be to question the murdered girl's friends, acquaintances and co-office workers—Cathy had been employed by a major insurance firm as a secretary—as to her words and behavior during the last few hours and days of her life. Perhaps, buried under the inevitable slag-heap of routine, might lie some clue to Cathy's killers and/or her housemate's whereabouts.

Unfortunately, this move would be obvious to the police as well—and they were far better prepared than the redhead to conduct such a blanket investigative chore than any lone operative, however gifted and lucky.

Shayne had a hunch he was going to need all the luck he could find in this one.

Like all investigators who deal on occasion with the seamy side of society, the redhead operated through that strange, seldom acknowledged form of swap and barter known as information you owe me one, I owe you one, collection time coming up, what do you hear about...?

Most successful police work is the result of information, whether from above or underground. Without their paid informers, every metropolitan police force in the world would be virtually out of business in short order.

Shayne had his own roster of insiders, of odd characters knowledgeable in ways and means of which the bulk of society knows nothing. So, as he ate, he pondered whom he could turn to for swift results, both in the matter of Myra Rainey's disappearance and Cathy Whiting's murder. Somebody had to know something. But who and where?

Darlene, the pretty young brunette who had served Shayne his dinner, came to the booth with a portable phone and knelt to jack it in.

It was Tim. He said, "We're at a dead end. Get over to Mr. Latimer's office as soon as you can, Mike."

"Five minutes," the detective assured him.

When Shayne left, he was only half aware that a thickset young man at the front-door end of the bar put down a barely touched highball and rose to follow him. Nor did he note the grey Mercedes that trailed him discreetly through the thickening early evening traffic.



III

FOUR MEN WERE SEATED around the broad teakwood table in the publisher's offices atop the new *Daily News* building. At its head was *News* publisher Roy Latimer, short, chunky, with the features of a non-Ethiopian gnome. On his right, with legal papers spread out in front of him, was balding James J. Lowman, top attorney for Latimer's battery of lawyers. Opposite Lowman sat shirt-sleeved Carl Dirkson, spectacles pushed high on his forehead, and Tim Rourke.

Shayne slid into the chair

next to Lowman, who looked at him blankly as if he were not quite sure the detective was actually present.

Roy Latimer said, "Mr. Shayne, I am told you found the Whiting girl's body. What in hell happened?"

The publisher had a football quarterback's voice—high pitched, with a rough cutting edge calculated to be audible above the roar of any crowd. Now and then, he interrupted the detective's concise account of the Coconut Grove killing with quick questions, more often to the point than not.

When Shayne finished, Latimer turned to Lowman, who had sat silent throughout, said, "Where does that leave us, Jim?"

The attorney shook himself as if to awaken from a trance, breathed deeply, then replied, "Up the creek without a paddle, I'm afraid. Whiting was our sole remaining lead to Myra Rainey. If Myra fails to show when the trial starts Monday, we're deader than mutton."

He picked up a ballpoint and began to doodle on a sheet of scrap paper in front of him.

"You have no clue to this capper's identity, Mr. Shayne?" the publisher asked.

The detective said, "All I saw was the back of his head as he drove off."

"You didn't get his license number?"

"No way."

"What do you propose to do?"

Shayne spoke quietly. "I propose to find other leads to the Rainey girl's whereabouts. I've only been on the case one day."

"What if they've killed her, too?" Latimer asked. His questions came like bullets.

"Then I'll find her body, if it still exists. If she's been trash-empted or tossed into the ocean, I'll find out."

"That could take time," the publisher reminded him, "and time is what we're damned near out of. This is Thursday night."

"I'm aware of it, Latimer. But my deadline record is not too bad."

"I'm aware of *that*, Shayne." The publisher ran a hand over his balding head, turned to his attorney, added, "What if Shayne does find evidence that Rainey is dead? Will that help us?"

Again James Lowman seemed to shake himself out of a trance. He said, "It should help—at least toward getting a further postponement out of Judge Garvey."

"Cathy Whiting's murder won't do that?" Latimer asked.

"Not unless we can tie it in with Myra Rainey's disappearance—and thus far I

have heard nothing that suggests hard evidence."

Latimer turned to his editor and star reporter on the opposite side of the table, said, "Carl, I expect you to use the full resources of the *News* either to find Miss Rainey or to link her apartment mate's murder with the lawsuit. If Shayne needs help, give it to him. That's all for now, gentlemen."

He rose and strode from the room, a worried but still cocky little Napoleon of a man. James Lowman stood up, rather unsteadily, the detective thought, and assembled the papers in front of him for transfer to his attaché case. As he did so, several sheets slipped to the carpet and the redhead picked them up and returned them. Lowman nodded his thanks and Mike Shayne joined Tim and Carl Dirkson, who were walking toward the door.

When they passed into the hall toward the elevators, Shayne heard the attorney say, "Operator, I want you to get me..."

The number Lowman requested was inaudible as one of the elevator doors clanged open.

"What do you think?" Carl Dirkson asked the redhead.

"I think Jim Lowman is dead on his feet."

"He's got a hell of a rep for

this kind of case," Tim Rourke suggested. The elevator halted at the third floor, the city room level. "Coming in, Mike?" the reporter added.

"I don't think I've got time," Shayne replied. He rode on down to the lobby, with its photomurals of the best *News* photographs and its slowly revolving world globe in the center. Outside, the doorman was getting out of a black Coronado.

"Shayne said, "Is this Mr. Lowman's car, Dave?"

"He just called for it. He's coming down now, Mr. Shayne."

"Thanks, Dave." The detective slipped a fivespot into an unreluctant hand, winked and went on to the parking lot, where his own Buick waited.

Although it might have been caused by indigestion or any number of other malaises, Lowman's behavior puzzled Shayne. He had an intuitive feeling that it lay rooted in brass-chill panic. He had all but smelled the aura of fear as he bent to retrieve the spilled papers.

From his newsmen friends' elevator comments, Lowman's trancelike behavior was not usual. This buttressed the redhead's intuitive assumption that the attorney's abstraction had been brought about by fear.

Question—what did James Lowman have to be afraid of? Two—if he was in panic, did said panic result from news of the murder of Cathy Whiting?

Mike Shayne determined to find out . . .

IV

THE MOST DIRECT AVENUE of approach, he decided, would be to follow the attorney home and ring his doorbell shortly after his arrival, a confrontation for which the redhead felt far from prepared. On the other hand, if he followed Lowman and the lawyer did not drive directly home, Shayne would at least know where else he was going.

When Lowman pulled out of the *News* parking lot, the detective waited out a slow ten-count, then followed him discreetly, sliding into the light night traffic a half dozen cars behind. Shayne knew that the well known attorney lived in the opulent area across Indian Creek. He was therefore surprised when Lowman turned south instead of north when they reached an artery.

Two of the intervening cars took the north turn, three headed south after the attorney's car—and one of them, the redhead saw, was a sleek grey Mercedes as it slid past a battery of bright sodium lamps.

The last time he had noticed such a car was when it took the driveway turn on two wheels, fleeing the scene of Cathy Whiting's murder. A frown creased Shayne's forehead as he let another car pass him to widen the pursuit gap. The odds against its being the murder car were a good hundred to one. Still . . .

One of the cars between the Eldorado and the Mercedes peeled off onto a side road, then another. The driver of the Mercedes let the other intervening car pass him . . . and then the one in front of that took a left turn to be followed by the last of the cover vehicles.

It was shortly after this that James Lowman must have become aware of the fact that he was being followed. From a dignified fifty-five miles per hour, the Cadillac suddenly spurted ahead. By his own speedometer, the redhead saw that it was going sixty-five, seventy-five, then eighty-five miles per hour.

The Mercedes held its own, as did Shayne's Buick. All intervening cover was gone, the highway was empty save for the three of them—but evidently the man in the Mercedes, his attention focussed on the car ahead, was unaware that he, too, was being followed. The redhead eased off

just a bit, keeping only the Mercedes in view.

A couple of miles further on, in thickening traffic, both cars ahead began to slow down. The detective kept pace with them, barely managed not to pass a right turn around a tree masked corner as the taillights of the foreign car turned off. It was Shayne's turn to corner on two wheels.

The byway was ill-lighted, its darkness further increased by an arcade of lofty palms that virtually shut out the night sky. Neither the Mercedes nor the Eldorado was in sight. The detective cruised it slowly, both ways, noting the name on the corner sign as he got back to the highway—*Las Palmas Drive*.

He drove back to the city's heart, battling a mounting sense of frustration. Somewhere behind him, he again heard the mournful whine of distant police sirens.

Flagler Street was still bright as day when the detective emerged from the small parking lot behind his office. Over the past fifteen years, the once relatively quiet thoroughfare had become the main drag for the half million Cubans Miami has absorbed since Castro came to power in their native land.

The sidewalks were crowded, the kiosk coffee hot as hell, the

conversation-table explosively high. But the big redhead enjoyed the sometimes vitopercative, always vivid vitality of the round-the-clock scene.

Letting himself into his two-room office, Shayne used Lucy Hamilton's monitor board to put in a call to James Lowman's residence, which was listed in the directory. To his surprise, the attorney answered.

"Just wanted to be sure you got in safely," the detective told him. "I had reason to think you were followed."

"By whom?" Lowman countered.

"By a grey Mercedes that looked very much like the car I saw fleeing the Whiting killing earlier this evening," Shayne replied.

"You've got to be kidding!" The attorney's previously apathetic voice now sounded like the crack of a whip.

"I assure you I'm not."

There was long silence from the other end of the line, then, "Shayne, are you sure?"

"Just as sure as you are."

"What does that mean, Shayne?"

"It means," said the detective, "that I followed your pursuer and you south from the *News* building this evening—and that you suddenly became aware of your tail. At least you

upped your speed from fifty-five to eighty-five."

"That was because I changed my mind and decided to get back here for reasons I shan't go into."

"You must have run all the way home," the redhead told him.

"You are insolent, Shayne."

"Good night, Counsellor," said the detective. "Better check the locks on your doors and windows, just in case."

"Shayne . . ."

There was a hint of urgency in Lowman's voice that made the redhead wonder if he weren't about to hear either an appeal for help, a revelation—or perhaps both.

"Yes, Mr. Lowman?" he said when the silence had gone on a little too long.

"It's nothing, Shayne. Goodnight."

The lawyer hung up.

Shayne cradled his instrument and pondered the attorney's strange behavior that evening. During the meeting, it seemed to the redhead that Lowman had been in something close to a state of shock. Nor had his behavior since been outwardly rational—heading south toward an unknown destination, shaking pursuit and then winding up at the northern end of the city.

And what had he been about

to reveal via the telephone, only to change his mind?

The detective went to the inner office, switched on the lights, dug into the bottom drawer of the green metal file and came out with the bottle of Martell he kept on hand for just such occasions—or for no occasion at all. He got ice from the mini-freezer in the corner, made himself a stout cognac on the rocks, put his feet up on the desk and lit a cigaret, further pondering the case.

If Myra Rainey did not appear to testify for the defense, Roy Latimer, along with his co-defendants, would lose the case in all probability. Faced with a seven-figure adverse verdict, plus court costs and penalties, the vital little publisher might well have to sell his newspaper to keep afloat.

If the defense could tie Cathy Whiting's killing to the case, they might get a sorely needed continuance. Shayne decided that this was the point he should concentrate his investigation upon. *What investigation?* He hadn't got off the ground yet.

He finished his brandy and cigaret simultaneously, decided to go home and get some sleep and began his real investigation under way in the morning. He had only two days and two nights remaining. He hoped to

hell it would be enough time.

He turned off the lights, locked up, walked downstairs and out the back door to the little rear lot where he had left his Buick. It was no longer alone in the twelve-slot parking area. There was a grey Mercedes blocking the Flagler Street exit less than sixty feet away.

Caught in the open, Shayne did the only thing he could think of—he went into a spin, crouching and straightening, changing course but actually moving at a near-sprint toward the only cover available—that of the Buick.

The first bullet whizzed past him, cutting a brief air-hole in the exact spot his head had occupied a split second earlier. The second shot was another miss by inches, as was the third. The fourth bullet, aimed low, took the heel cleanly off his left shoe—but by that time he had gained the shelter of his car and had unholstered his Colt .45.

At such short range, his ambusher's long-barreled target pistol would have little or no advantage over the automatic. In fact, Shayne's heavier slugs might well do the more damage.

The redhead managed to draw two more shots by raising his head, then ducking quickly,

and a third lift drew no response at all. Shayne could just see the left shoulder and the left portion of his would-be killer's head protruding beyond the rear of his car. He seemed to be engaged in putting a fresh magazine into his weapon.

Mike Shayne took careful aim, holding the Colt with both hands, resting his elbows on the hood of the Buick. He wanted merely to nick the exposed shoulder of his overconfident opponent—well aware that even a full shoulder wound at that distance with the Colt could well be fatal.

He wanted this killer alive.

But just as Shayne squeezed the trigger, his target leaned forward and down, evidently to jam the fresh clip into place. Result—the detective's heavy .45 slug caught its target full in the side of the head, causing him to pitch forward on what was left of his face.

The redhead uttered a four-syllable word of frustration as he holstered his gun and moved toward the corpse he had just created out of living man.

V

MIAMI CHIEF OF POLICE Will Gentry sat behind his desk, chewed on the end of a dead perfecto. The stubble of white beard on his lower face, the

tousled state of his white hair, usually well groomed, revealed the length of his working day.

"Dammit," he growled at Mike Shayne, seated across from him. "I should have guessed you were involved. Why didn't you stand by after calling in the Whiting woman's murder?"

"I had to report to my client, Chief," said Shayne, "and you know better than to question me on that."

A gleam lightened the glower in the burly Police Chief's expression. He leaned back, removed the cigar, said, "I not only know better, Mike, I know all about it. Hell, man, I recommended you to Roy Latimer."

The redhead managed not to blink, uttered a dry, "Thanks, Chief."

"But now," Gentry went on as if Shayne had not interrupted, "I'm beginning to wish I'd negatived you. This was one night when I was planning to turn in early."

"Sorry." The detective tried hard to look sympathetic.

"I suppose you'll want to know what we've got on the bodies. I can tell you right now, it's not much. This latest victim of yours was a hit man—name of Mac Straka. Originally from Detroit. A record as long as your arm."

"Any idea what brought him to Miami?"

"Sure—we've both got a damn good idea. But don't ask me who paid his fare. You know and I know they never work through direct contact."

"What about Cathy Whiting?" Shayne inquired.

"So far, probably less than you have. At least you talked to her."

"On the phone—and only to set up our meet."

Gentry shook his massive head. "It puts you one up on us. Mrs. Fowler—that's her landlady, the owner of the big house—is flying in from Bermuda sometime tomorrow. Maybe she can help."

"What's the b.g. on Whiting, Will?"

The Police Chief shrugged, eyed the dead cigar, said, "Just what we picked up in her place. From Summit, New Jersey. Rutgers graduate. Catherine Gibbs secretarial school. Been down here about a year. No criminal record."

"Will," said Shayne, "do you have any scam on why this Meadows-Latimer lawsuit should erupt into murder?"

"If I did, do you think I'd be turning you loose, Mike?" Gentry replied. "I'm hoping you'll save the taxpayers some of their hard-earned money."

"You're a hard man, Chief."

"And you're not a funny one, Mike." The Police Chief eyed his chewed-up cigar with distaste, dropped it into a wastebasket, said, "Now, what have you got for me?"

"All I've had time to do since I got on this one is run down Cathy Whiting, sit in on a meeting at the *News* and get into that shootout outside the office."

Quite deliberately, he omitted all mention of his tailing Attorney Jim Lowman, of the latter's strange behavior and apparent panic. If Lowman ever found out Shayne had sicced the cops on him—and he almost inevitably would—Messrs. Latimer, Dirkson and Rourke would be out one private detective, and Mike Shayne would be out of one job.

This one, he wanted to see through even more than usual, if only for the sake of clearing his friend, Tim Rourke.

"All right, Shayne." The growl was back in Chief Gentry's voice. "Get the hell out of here. And, please—no more corpses after working hours."

The redhead rose, placed his right hand over his heart, said, "I'll try, Chief—honest Injun."

"Out!" This time, it was a roar.

It was well after midnight, and the detective went home and to bed. There were no fur-

ther alarms during that night . . .

Shayne woke up early the next morning. After shaving and showering, he felt halfway human, and a hot cup of instant coffee, laced with a generous slug of Martell, took him the rest of the way. The early day was cool and sunlit and traffic was still light as he toolled the Buick southward toward Coconut Grove. When he turned off South Bayshore Drive, the hands of his wristwatch indicated exactly seven twenty-eight.

He wanted another look at the scene of Cathy Whiting's slaying the evening before.

A single uniformed policeman sat behind the wheel of a black-and-white on the street outside, where the detective had parked the evening before. Shayne pulled in behind him, got out and approached him from the driver's side.

"Hello, Shayne. You're up early." The driver, who had evidently been watching him via the rearview mirror, was a man the redhead knew.

"Hello, Ryan," said the detective, pushing his snapbrim grey fedora back on his head. "Anyone mind if I take a look around inside?"

"I'll have to call it in," said Ryan, activating his communicator. He asked the question and, after a few brief sec-

onds, the box squawked, "Captain Sturgis says he can look his fool red head off—but just took, not touch."

"You heard?" the patrolman asked with a sardonic smile.

Shayne nodded.

"Just to remind you," Ryan went on, "the whole house in back has been photographed and dusted. You put a finger on anything, and the boys'll know it."

"Capiche." The detective flipped a hand and turned in at the brief driveway. He heard the squawkbox sputter behind him and Ryan called, "Hey, Shayne—the captain says to keep an eye out for a contact lens he dropped in there somewhere last night."

"Tell him where he can put it," the redhead called back.

Shayne paused on the porch of the converted out-building behind the larger dwelling to study the broken front window through which the shots had been fired at him during his previous visit. At the time, he had known it was a close call, but his adrenals had been up and he had kept moving. Now, considering the narrowness of his escape, he felt a shudder the length of his spine.

It had been a very near thing.

Carefully using a handkerchief to avoid fouling up any

fingerprints, even though Ryan said the whole place had been dusted, the detective went on inside.

The chalked outline of the late Cathy Whiting's body was marked on the floor, some of it drawn over the ugly stain of the girl's blood, now turned almost black. Traces of print dust were visible on tabletops, window sills, artifacts, light fixtures. Thanks to the angle of the early morning sunlight, the interior of the little house was unexpectedly bright.

What in hell was he looking for? He honestly did not know.

VI

THERE WAS BUT a single story with room for two bedrooms, a bath, a living room with dining area and a kitchen. All were in considerable disarray, after being rifled by Captain Len Sturgis' Homicide crew. He paid more attention to Myra Rainey's bedroom than to Cathy's—it was easy to identify it via the monograms, stationery, initialed objects.

Shayne took his time but found nothing.

Back in the living room, he glanced around again, did a double take as the slant of the sunlight caused something to glitter on the front wall just beside the door, just above the

telephone table. The detective walked over, stooped, squinted at it. It was a telephone number—seven digits—scrawled on the wall itself with an old-fashioned graphite pencil, whose trace had picked up the sunlight.

All around it were other phone numbers—the calendar page was literally covered with them. Since they were in different handwritings, Shayne judged both girls had the habit of writing numbers on the nearest available surface. An untidy habit, perhaps, but one that indicated a life lived without fear or concealment.

Most were in ballpoint, a few in eyebrow pencil, fewer still in graphite. These, especially that which reflected the sun, seemed to be the most recent. At any event, they were scrawled over other numbers. Pulling out ballpoint and notebook, Shayne wrote them all down. There were eleven of them.

Since the Homicide Bureau undoubtedly had them, too, he did not know exactly what use he could make of them. Still . . . the police would be following other routines before tackling such drudgery—which reminded Shayne that he had yet to put out feelers through his private information channels, something he had meant to do the night before.



On the way back to Flagler Street, he stopped for breakfast at a diner made from an actual Pullman Dining Car on the old Eastern Shore Railroad. It featured white linen tablecloths, blossoms in bud vases, quality china and flatwear, excellent cuisine and service right around the clock, with prices to match.

There, Shayne ordered a thick grilled ham steak, a trio of shirred eggs in sherry, toasted French rolls with sweet butter and a beautifully browned hillock of hashed brown potatoes. The coffee was rich and black and bitter.

Refreshed, he drove to his office, which Lucy Hamilton

was in the act of opening for the day. She held the outer office phone in her hand, said, "Hello, Michael. She hung up."

"Who, Angel?" He removed his hat and scaled it accurately onto its usual hook on the hat-tree in the far corner.

"She didn't say. She asked for you. I said you hadn't come in yet. She hung up. You came in."

"Damn!" said the detective. Then, at the quick concern on his secretary's pretty face, "Don't worry, Lucy—it wasn't your fault."

He tugged at his left earlobe, frowned at nothing a long moment, then said, "Angel, I want to talk to Homicide. Len Sturgis, if he's in."

The redhead went into his own inner office, sat behind his desk, lit a cigaret and waited for Lucy's phoned summons. It came within a minute, in Captain Sturgis' voice, saying, "Sturgis here, Mike. Something on the fire?"

"Maybe," Shayne replied. "Len, when you ran through the Cathy Whiting place, did you check for a phone tap?"

"Hold on—I'll find out." The detective could hear the big captain's deep voice talking into a desk communicator. Then, "Sorry, the boys didn't get around to it last night. I'm sending a wire-tap crew out

there right away. You think there was a patch?"

"I'd like to find out," the redhead replied. "Thanks, Len."

"Do me a favor," said the Chief of Detectives. "Next time you find a body, stick around till we get there."

"I'll try," Shayne promised.

He had Lucy dial Jim Lowman's office. The attorney came on almost at once. "You'll have to get here fast," he said. "I'm due in Superior Court at ten o'clock."

Before he left, the redhead handed Lucy the page of wall telephone numbers copied in his notebook. "Ring them," he said.

"What do I tell them if they answer?"

"Tell them I want to talk to them—that is, if they're female. Tell them I'll call them back. Got it?"

"I've got it." Lucy's expression became dangerously demure. "If a man answers, hang up."

"That's it, Angel." The detective kissed the top of her dark head before leaving.

It was nine-forty-one when Mike Shayne walked into the quiet opulence of the law offices of MacIntosh, Lowman, and Parkes in a spanking new chrome and dark glass skyscraper overlooking the bay. Lowman's secretary came out

promptly and escorted him along a carpeted corridor to the attorney's private suite.

"Mr. Lowman is expecting you," she said as she opened the door.

"I know."

During the brief drive across town, the detective had been digesting what he had learned and tried to rationalize his extrapolations. They were based on a slender roster of facts, but instinct, backed by long experience, gave him a strong sense of assurance.

He felt certain that Myra Rainey was not in the hands or under the control of Carl Meadows. If she were, the murder of Cathy Whiting made no sense. In a very real sense, the redhead blamed himself for the tragedy, although Cathy would probably have had to die anyway.

Shayne now suspected that his arrival outside the Coconut Grove out-building had been spotted by whoever was in the little house with Whiting—probably, if not certainly, the now defunct button man, Mac Strada. She had been wasted because she knew where Myra Paine was hiding, and her killer knew she knew it. Evidently, he had considered it more important to prevent Cathy Whiting from giving the information to Shayne than ob-

taining it for his principal or principals.

Of course, if Cathy's phone had not been tapped, this theory would be set back on his heels. The hit man had to be sent there because it was known the redhead would be arriving at seven o'clock. There had to have been a tap on the line somewhere.

It was also possible that Strada had obtained the information before Shayne's arrival and then wasted the girl to keep her from passing it along to the detective. He devoutly hoped not.

The strange behavior of attorney James Lowman was the next item on Shayne's agenda, and he had resolved on settling this via face-to-face confrontation. He took a deep breath as the secretary stood aside to let him enter.

The attorney's office, like the foyer, was impressive. Three walls lined with floor to ceiling shelves of white leather-bound law tomes letted in gold leaf. Rich carpeting, furniture of leather and/or mahogany, a fourth wall that was all picture window with a panorama of the bay and Miami Beach on its further shore with its cestel-lated row of magnificent resort hotels.

The only item missing seemed to be James Lowman,

who was nowhere in evidence.

Mike Shayne finally found the attorney curled up in a foetal position behind the masking rectangle of his broad desk. Understandably under the circumstances, the redhead thought he, too, must have been shot. But there was no blood seepage anywhere.

Kneeling, with his head close to Lowman's, the detective heard faint, hoarse breathing. He noted the cyanosis of the lips as he rose and reached for a desk phone, said, "Better call the paramedics, somebody. Mr. Lowman has had an attack."

VII

MIKE SHAYNE WAS GLAD to get away from the stricken attorney's offices within half an hour. Lowman's physician was a highly reputable specialist in cardiac cases, and the detective was satisfied that the lawyer's attack was both genuine and not induced by any outside agency—physically, at any rate.

The question plaguing Shayne in re Jim Lowman—was—had his attack been triggered by something connected with the Meadows-Latimer libel case?

The lawyer had been obviously shaken up last night—at the time, the redhead judged his condition was caused by

word of Cathy Whiting's murder. Which raised another point...

Even though Lowman was not a criminal attorney, it seemed unlikely to Shayne that he should not be familiar with at least reports of violence. He was too old and too obviously experienced a man. There had to be some other reason why news of the girl's murder should have hit him so hard.

A couple of other questions that remained unanswered—one was the cause of Lowman's strange drive after leaving the meeting with Roy Latimer, Carl Dirkson, Tim and Shayne himself. Two, why had the driver of the Mercedes—presumably the late Mac Straka—followed the attorney?

Add a query as to what Lowman had been briefly on the verge of revealing when the redhead called him the night before, and there were five big X-for-unknowns Shayne had hoped to resolve in the now-cancelled interview.

His next stop was at the office of Roy Latimer in the *Daily News* Building. The chunky little publisher received the detective at once in a smaller office of his top-floor suite, nodded when informed of Lowman's attack and said, "His office just called."

Then he leaned back in his

teakwood desk chair, eyed Shayne thoughtfully for a long moment, said, "What was your impression of Jim's behavior last night?"

"My impression was of a very disturbed man," the redhead replied.

Latimer nodded. "So you felt it, too. I never saw him so shaken up."

Mike Shayne went on to describe the attorney's subsequent odd behavior, concluding with the shoot-out in his office parking lot following the call to Lowman at home.

"We ran the Cathy Whiting murder story, of course," said Latimer. "The boys were cut up over your not giving them a news beat, but I told them to soft-pedal your connection with us. You're sure this Mac Straka was the man who killed Whiting?"

"Hell, I'm not *sure*—but I doubt anyone sending out more than one hit man in a grey Mercedes."

There was more talk. Latimer seemed almost relieved at the attorney's collapse, saying, "We've already moved for a postponement of the trial. They'll have to give it to us now, of course. But I don't want you to let up for a moment, Shayne. Not with violence and murder involved."

"I agree."

"Any progress on the Rainey girl?"

"Not enough to talk about—yet," the redhead replied.

"Well, I guess that's it for now—unless there's something else we can do for you."

"There is. I'd like to use a private phone for a few minutes."

The publisher nodded toward a partly open door, said, "Be my guest. And thanks for coming in."

The door led to a small conference room. Shayne picked up a non-switchboard telephone, dialled a number. He asked for Bertha Thompson and, when she came on the line, identified himself and said, "How about lunch?"

"Business or pleasure?" she countered.

"Both, I hope."

They met in the twilight dark lounge bar of the Seminole Room on Biscayne Boulevard. Bertha was a medium-short, broad-bodied woman with a well constructed broad-cheeked face. The dress she had on—she never wore pants suits—was simple but expensive to the knowing eye. She swung a large tan-leather shoulder bag in her left hand as if it were a tiny tote-bag.

Bertha Thompson was sole proprietor of her own C.P.A. firm in Miami and was reputed

to be the most efficient tax and costs accountant between Tampa and Key West. The redhead had once managed to save her from a vicious male chauvinist frame-up that would have cost Bertha her hard won license earned some six years earlier.

Since, there had been other favors, both ways . . .

When they were seated over her vodka Martini and Shayne's Martell on the rocks, she said, "I heard about old man Lowman just now."

"You hear everything," the detective told her.

"If I don't, it's not for lack of trying." She lifted her glass. "Here's to crime, Mike-baby."

They drank, then ordered luncheon. When the waiter had departed, Bertha rested both elbows on the tablecloth and said, "Between you and me, I'm not surprised Jim Lowman cracked up. He was carrying a hell of a load."

"In what way?"

Bertha paused to marshal her thoughts. Then, "He was leading the defense battery in the Meadows-Latimer thing, you know—of course you do, since you're on it. The inside is, Meadows was leaning on Lowman—real heavy."

"With what?" Shayne asked.

Bertha opened her hands and shrugged, her not unhandsome

if too-square face a question mark.

"Who knows for sure?" she countered. "Could be some past corner he cut for a client. Could be a few income tax shavings. Could be something more personal, if you dig, Shayne."

The detective thought it added up. Lowman's behavior had made him suspect something of the sort. The fact that he found himself not only in the position of having to double-cross a client but of being controlled by a murderer could account for his reaction to Shayne's word on the Cathy Whiting killing.

He said, "But, dammit, Bertha, where in hell did Carl Meadows get the bread to throw his weight around so heavily? I thought Tim's exposé and the prosecutions that followed wiped him out."

"Characters like Carl Meadows always seem to be able to get their hands on some loot," she replied. "But it's a good question, Mike. Let little Bertha see what she can find out."

The luncheon arrived then. Able trencherman that he was, Shayne found himself hard-pressed to keep up with his companion. Bertha waded through the four-course meal as if food were about to go out of style permanently. A large

plate of thick *purée mongole* was the first casualty. It was followed by a larger casserole of sliced pheasant and mushrooms in cream and butter sauce laced with Bordeau, an avacado salad and a rich glazed strawberry-and-cream custard tart. Coffee and liqueurs followed, with the redhead confining himself to cognac as usual.

There was no more talk of the case during the remainder of their luncheon. Not until Shayne escorted Bertha to her car, a smart, expensive little Seville, did she lay a hand on his arm and say, "Call me this evening, Mike—and thanks for a marvelous lunch. A gal's got to keep her figure from falling away to a mere framework of skin and bones."

The redhead half-grinned crookedly and shook his head as he waved farewell. Then he turned and got in the Buick, which a uniformed attendant had just driven up to the end-driven up to the entrance.

Mike Shayne's next move was to drive to a quietly plush restaurant-cabaret called The Golden Onion on Biscayne Boulevard. Although it was not officially open until the cocktail hour, it served during the day as the office of manager-part owner Lou Manning. It was Manning the redhead wanted to see.

VIII

BEHIND A HAIL-FELLOW well-met facade that made Lou an ideal front man for his restaurant lurked a photographic memory and ability to keep a secret. Over the years, the restaurateur had become an unofficial message center for denizens of the lower upper-world and upper underworld.

As he pulled into the Onion's near-empty parking lot, Shayne figured it a 99-to-1 bet that Manning would know exactly what the connection was between Jim Lowman and Carl Meadows. Getting the information out of him, of course, would be something else.

"Come on in, Shayne." The restaurateur's broad, suntanned face lit up in a smile that made the whole office glow. "Glad you got here. I've been trying to reach you but that girl of yours keeps telling me you're out."

"Well . . . ?" The detective let that one hang while he considered Manning's motives in trying to reach him.

"Okay—so you *are* out. Have a smoke—a real honest-to-God Havana." The restaurateur pushed a half-empty box of gold banded perfectos across his desk toward Shayne, who declined as he sat down.

"Okay, Lou," he said. "You want to talk to me? I want to

ask you a couple of questions."

"That figures." Manning nodded as he lit up his own cigar. "You go first."

The detective pushed his hat back again, tugged his earlobe, said, "You heard about Jim Lowman?"

"About his attack." Manning nodded again. "I also heard you were there."

"I found him on his office floor," said the redhead. "I'd like to know what put him there."

The restaurateur blew two perfect smoke rings before replying. Then he said, "Maybe he ate too much. Maybe he smoked too much. Maybe he keeled over because you were coming to see him."

"Negative, negative, negative," said Shayne. "Come on, Lou—why was he afraid of Carl Meadows?"

"Old stuff, Shayne."

"But not too old for the statute of limitations."

"Only two crimes have no time limit," Lou Manning said. "Murder and cheating on the Federal income tax. Take your pick."

Shayne ran a thumbnail along the line of his jaw, then nodded. Like other men of mild habit, he supposed the stricken attorney was capable of killing in self defense. But not of a murder that would leave him

legally culpable. That left only tax evasion. He said, "Thanks, Lou—now it's your turn to ask the questions."

"Not a question, an invitation. Peter Luce wants to see you—at your earliest convenience."

The redhead's left eyebrow rose half an inch. Peter Luce, officially retired from the fish freezing business that was his nominal source of livelihood, remained the unofficial czar emeritus of the Organization for all Florida south of Tampa Bay. If he wanted to see Mike Shayne, it meant the underworld was involved in some way with the Meadows-Latimer libel suit.

But what way?

Deciding there was only one answer to that question, Mike Shayne rose, thanked Manning for the information and headed for his Buick. It took him forty minutes to reach the gates of Peter Luce's driveway off the Trail.

From its gilded cast-iron gateway to the furthest stretch of the mesh steel barrier that surrounded the twenty acres of landscaped grounds, the former fish freezer's estate had been literally carved out of swamp-land. Set amidst impenetrable semi-tropical jungle, it was in effect an island impervious to invasion by water.

A perfect place of retirement for a man who had racked up more than his share of violent enemies during a lifetime of dealing with and inside of organized crime.

The young man who met Shayne at the gate and rode with him to the house itself was fair haired with a mod cut and clad in a costly blue denim leisure suit with enough patches for an old-fashioned quilt. He looked like a university student or recent graduate and, the detective judged, probably was.

Another attractive young man awaited them under the porte cochère of the mansion. Shayne got out and his companion slid behind the Buick's wheel, drove it smoothly around a corner as the detective and his new escort entered the large house.

Impressive was the best word the redhead could come up with—huge hall framed by a divided staircase leading to a balcony above. Costly rugs on the floor, costlier tapestries on the walls, costly black walnut furniture against the walls, a wrought-iron chandelier. Young man No. 2 led the detective softly through to a French window opening onto a flagged terrace overlooking rich gardens, a fountain and a porticoed swimming pool in the rear.



Here, at a glass-topped table, Peter Luce sat.

His hair was silver, his leathery face seamed, his body skeleton lean beneath the pale blue jumpsuit that covered it limply—but the dark eyes crackled with vitality, the white teeth gleamed like polished ivory in the afternoon sunlight as he rose to greet his visitor.

Peter Luce—née Pietro Lucini.

"How kind of you to come!" The voice was soft as silk with just a faint undertone of sandpaper. "Sit with me and enjoy a drink."

Before Mike Shayne could reply, another young man appeared bearing a tray, put a vermouth cassis in front of Peter Luce, a Martell on the rocks in front of the detective. Luce lifted his glass in a decorous salute, the redhead did likewise. Neither spoke further until the tumblers were again on the glass top of the table.

"Mr. Shayne," Luce said, leaning back in his chair, "I wish to thank you for saving us the trouble in a certain—shall we say delicate?—matter."

Shayne nodded. As long as Luce was willing to carry the conversational ball, the detective was quite willing to permit him. He was certain he had not been summoned here merely to receive thanks for the removal of button-man Mac Straka from the living scene.

"I feel that we owe you for it." A pause, then, "As you probably know, Mr. Shayne, with the passage of time, our business grows more and more respectable." And, as the redhead nodded again, "If there are occasional—regrettable necessities, they occur in other businesses as well. You follow me, Mr. Shayne?"

Once again, Shayne nodded.

"It is a part of our job to see that solution of these occasional regrettable incidents does not get out of hand. It is up to us to control such sad affairs."

This time, when Luce paused, Mike Shayne spoke. "You are telling me, Mr. Luce, that you knew nothing about the importation to Miami of the capper called Mac Straka."

"No, Mr. Shayne." This accompanied by a firm head shake. "I did not say that. Of course, we knew of it."

"But Straka was brought in without either your approval or control."

"Ah, Mr. Shayne." Again the dazzling smile. "You understand me perfectly."

"Very well," said the detective. "What is it you wish me to do?"

IX

THE DARK EYES BORED into Shayne like twin laser beams from a face that was suddenly a mask of concern. The soft voice said, "We want you to take care of yourself, Mr. Shayne."

There was a message here. The detective puzzled over it briefly, then stabbed. "Another unauthorized import?"

A slow nod. "Exactly, Mr. Shayne. A gentleman from Kansas City. He may be here

in Miami now. We were not given the time of his arrival."

"Thank you, Peter Luce. How will I know him?"

A shrug. "We do not have further details—yet. If you should feel you need protection..."

It was delicately phrased. The detective made his refusal polite. "I've survived this far. With all due respect, I feel I do better alone."

"As you wish." Luce accepted his turn-down without visible reaction. Then, "But there is always the undeterminate factor of fortune."

"Let us hope good luck continues." Shayne raised a hand with the fingers crossed.

Luce nodded, both men drank. Putting down his glass, the redhead said, "Mr. Luce, I hate to impose on you further, but there is a question I must ask."

Peter Luce made a think-nothing-of-it gesture.

"Who the devil is backing Carl Meadows? I thought he was bankrupt."

"I fear you will have to ask Mr. Meadows that in person, Mr. Shayne."

"You don't know?"

"We should very much like to find out. Perhaps, if, as you say, you are lucky, you will discover that for yourself. In that case, we very much wish you

would allow us the information. It is information that could be of value to us."

"If I am satisfied that divulging it will not hurt my client, Mr. Luce."

"Of course." The slow nod again. Peter Luce finished his apéritif, the detective his brandy. The interview was ended.

Shayne drove back to the office on Flagler Street. Lucy made a face at him as he entered, after a moment put the phone back in its cradle.

"Any luck?" he asked her.

She sighed with a pleasing swell of sweatered bosom, said, "So far, I've got a dry-cleaner lady, three males and seven d.a.'s. One of the males tried to date me."

"What did I tell you to do if a man answered?" the detective reminded her. Lucy wrinkled her nose at him again as she began dialling again, using a ballpoint to save her fingernails.

Shayne went inside his private office and dug out the Martell. Thus far, the case made him feel as if he were caught in a giant electric blender. Round and round and around, with jolts of violence at irregular intervals. He was considering ways and means of getting at Carl Meadows when the desk phone rang, causing

him to jump and slop brandy on the desk blotter.

It was Bertha Thompson. She said, "You owe me a drink, Mike. Feel like buying me one?"

"Any time, sweet."

"Like how about now?"

Bertha was already at the Prince Gustav when Mike Shayne arrived. This time she joined him in a brandy on the rocks. She said, "Mike, let's get smashed."

"You go ahead," he told her. "Better leave me out, though. I seem to have a problem following my footsteps."

"Problems are my meat and drink. Hell, problems are my loving business, Mike."

"I'm afraid this isn't your kind of a problem," Shayne assured her. "Now—to what do I owe you the honor of this drink?"

"Business—always business!" Bertha essayed a pout, failed to make it with her good humored face, said, "Ever hear of a man named Jake O'Reilly?"

"The factor?"! He nodded. "Don't tell me he's angeling Meadows."

"I don't have to. You must told me." A pause for a sip, then, "He's the one."

Mike Shayne thought that over, frowned, said, "That doesn't tell us too much, does it? Like, whose money is Jake

using to bankroll Meadows?"

"Come on, Mike, do you think I'm a dunce? I wouldn't lay that on you to con a free drink. No, I got hold of Jake's C.P.A. and—well, he owes me a favor."

"Good girl. Who is it?"

"Ever hear of Ryan Akanian?"

"Let me think." Shayne frowned into his cognac. The name was familiar but its connotations eluded him... until he thought of Roy Latimer, which made him think of newspapers. Then he had it.

"A media mogul—with a chain of TV and radio stations and newspapers in the Southwest?" he countered.

Bertha nodded, said, "It gives one to think, doesn't it, Mike?"

"It does indeed."

The afternoon was latening by the time the detective got back to Roy Latimer's office. When Shayne informed him that Ryan Alanian was bankrolling Meadows, the *News* publisher slammed the flat of both hands down hard on his desktop.

"I should have known!" he exclaimed. "The son of a bitch is trying to force me to sell out through that damned libel suit." He got to his feet and began pacing the carpet.

"You know him?" Shayne asked.

"I must have attended half a

dozen publishers' conventions with that bush-headed punk," Latimer exclaimed. "I've heard he was a rapacious bastard, but he always seemed friendly enough to me. *Why, that little . . .*"

The fulminations continued for a full eleven minutes by the clock on the wall before the dynamic little publisher subsided. Then he flung himself back in his chair, looked at the detective gloomily.

"The hell of it is," he said, "if we don't come up with Myra Rainey before the trial, he might just do it, too."

"I don't believe Meadows has Rainey." Shayne repeated his thinking on the subject, concluded, "I hear they've imported another hit man—this one from K.C. They wouldn't do that if they already had Rainey. You can make book on that."

"I hope you're right," Latimer did not sound convinced. Then, leaning across his desk, "Shayne, for God's sake, *find that girl!*"

"I'll find her," the detective promised with an assurance he did not feel.

"You need money?" Latimer asked. Shayne shook his head. The publisher reached for a desk telephone, told the switchboard girl, "I want to talk to Ryan Akanian" . . . "No, I don't know where he is" . . . "Try the

San Antonio *Sentinel*. They should know."

"Do you think it's wise?" the redhead asked.

"What? To let him know I'm onto him?" Latimer frowned, ran a well-manicured hand over his face, then said, "Maybe you're right, Shayne."

He picked up the phone again, said, "Jeannie, cancel that last call." Then, to Shayne, "It's always wiser to hold a card in the hole. Even if it's not an ace."

The telephone rang. Latimer picked it up, listened, handed it to the detective. "For you."

It was Lucy Hamilton. She said, "Michael, I've got a lead." She sounded pleased, excited.

"Good girl. What is it?"

"One of those don't answer numbers finally did. It belongs to a Mrs. Michaels. Her apartment is next door to the one Myra Rainey is using for a hideout. They're old office buddies or something. Anyway, she says Myra will be glad to talk to you. Myra is using her for a phone drop."

"Good work, Angel—what's the address?"

It was in one of the older portions of the city, not too far from the address at which Cathy Whiting had been murdered. Paint was peeling from the two-story apartment building behind a row of ragged

palms. The granite doorsteps were eroded in shallow dips thanks to the pressure of millions of footsteps over the long decades since its erection.

In his elation over at last having a lead to the missing Myra Rainey, Shayne was almost there before he realized that he was again being tailed. His first thought was that the new button man import was following him, but he quickly dismissed the thought as absurd.

Not even Peter Luce could move that fast.

A professional hit man needs time to case the object of his attention, to learn his ways and select a moment and place for the execution. Even if he is briefed, he must check out the information given him.

The detective thought of shaking whoever was driving the blue Olds that clung stubbornly to his tail—another sign of non-professionalism—then decided to hell with that. If Myra Rainey was in the apartment building, she was not going to be there long. If she wasn't...

Myra Rainey was not there. Mrs. Michaels, a stout maternal type beneath a hard shell of powder and lipstick and liner and eyebrow pencil and long artificial lashes, appeared both embarrassed and distressed.

"Right after I hung up, Mr. Shayne, I heard the door of the apartment next door close. I didn't think anything of it. I was cooking Myra a casserole and I wanted to take it to her. When I knocked on her door, she didn't answer. When I went in, she was gone."

"Have you any idea where, Mrs. Michaels?"

Mrs. Michaels shook her head. There were tears in her pale blue eyes. She said, "That poor girl is scared half out of her mind. We used to work together in the same office before I quit to manage this building.

"She was crying when she came here the other night. The next apartment was vacant, so I put her up there. Such a dear, sweet person. But when she heard about her roommate being shot, she went all to pieces. I couldn't believe it when I heard it over the evening news..."

There was more—a great deal more—before Mike Shayne could get her to admit him to the apartment next door. She followed on his heels as he entered it and looked around.

It was sparsely furnished, a single with bath, kitchenette and Murphy bed. A solitary opened suitcase sat on the threadbare sofa revealing a small jumble of clothing, running mostly to reds and browns.

The detective remembered her from her photographs, Myra Rainey was a brunette.

"Did she have a car?" he asked.

Mrs. Michaels nodded again. It was a cute little M.G. She let me drive it to market—a neat help..."

Going to a window, Mrs. Michaels looked out, said over her shoulder to the redhead, "It's gone now."

She pulled back inside and Shayne looked out, noting the open space where it had stood in a row of half a dozen other modest vehicles.

The glittering chromium-nose of the Olds that had followed him protruded just beyond the corner of the apartment house. It was parked across the street.

Clumsy, clumsy, clumsy... the detective thought, pulling his head back in.

Then, turning to Mrs. Michaels, "You have no idea where she might have gone?"

The manager shook her lavender-topped head, said, "The only other place she mentioned was the little house in Coconut Grove—and she said he didn't dare go back there because she knew she'd be killed. I'm sure she never..."

Mrs. Michaels was off on another marathon monologue, in the midst of which the redhead beat a hasty retreat after



interrupting the river of words to thank her for her help.

Outside, the detective ignored the Olds and its driver. While Mrs. Michaels gushed, he had decided upon a course of action where the clumsy tail was concerned. He drove toward Ingraham Highway, taking a quick turn around a blind corner after a long half-mile, cut through an alley and a supermarket parking lot and was ready and waiting to pursue his pursuer as the latter drove past.

Shayne wanted to see what the unknown would do, where he would go, once he realized his quarry had vanished.

The detective followed the Olds cautiously, employing all the considerable shadowing skill at his command. He kept other cars between them, dropped back, picked up speed, not letting the driver ahead know he was being followed instead of following.

He actually turned off onto a side street as the Olds was braked to a halt in front of a

public telephone booth on the sidewalk. While the man made his call, the detective turned around and was ready to take up the pursuit once again. He might not be able to tell where his tail had come from, but he intended to find out where he was going.

It was a man, a thick-chested man of medium height, clad in a loud black-and-white hounds-tooth tweed jacket. That much he was able to catch through a break in the row of cypress trees that lined the sidewalks.

The man got back into the Olds, took off, and Mike Shayne followed, continuing to play it cute. Sunset lay behind them and glowed in Shayne's rear-view mirror as they headed toward Biscayne Bay, turning south, once again as they reached a by-road flanked by a series of once-opulent estates currently run halfway to seed.

The Olds entered a right hand driveway between two tall rows of ragged hedge. The redhead cut his engine as he approached and coasted the Buick squarely across the front of the road, blocking all passage. Sliding over the front seat of the Buick, he got out on the passenger's side in time to see the Olds vanish inside a garage at the far end of the short driveway.

Shayne walked toward it,

checking the .45 in his shoulder rig to make sure it was cocked and ready. It was an old garage, too old to have electronic doors. When the stocky man came out and reached to pull down the door, the detective was right behind him and checked his move.

"I think," Mike Shayne said "you and I had better have a little talk."

The man in the checkered sports jacket gasped and turned around, his arms automatically rising above his shoulders. But surrender was not in the thickset man's plan. Instead, he locked his hands and brought both of them down hard on the wrist of the redhead's gun hand, the while aiming a hard kick at the detective's shins.

Neither blow found its mark. Shayne leaped a foot backward, causing houndstooth jacket a double-miss, then brought up his right hand in a roundhouse blow that laid the flat of the heavy Colt automatic hard against the left side of the thickset man's head.

He went down like a felled ox. Shayne rolled him inside the garage and brought the door down, wedging it firmly in place with a piece of wood. He judged his erstwhile pursuer would be out of action for some time to come.

Then, holstering his weapon,

he walked up a narrow path to the house beyond.

X

THE PATH ENDED at another hedge, a low one, beyond which a brief stretch of badly manicured lawn covered a slight rise to the rear of the house. A row of French windows glittered a vivid reflection of the sunset behind him. Shayne thought of walking around to the front door, then thought, *To hell with that!* and pushed one of the windows open.

As he entered the sun room behind them, a resonant baritone said, "For Christ's sake, Shayne—don't you ever knock?"

It was Carl Meadows, silver haired, newly shaven, one of the few men the detective knew who could carry a considerable paunch and still look trim and vital. His striped slacks looked expensive, as did the blue-and-white Shantung sports shirt above them. A platinum wristwatch with diamond inserts glittered at the detective.

If he was bankrupt, Carl Meadows had to be the most costfully attired bankrupt in the redhead's knowledge.

Seated opposite him, fox-red of hair and complexion, wiry as a sculptor's armature, was Meadows' attorney, Alan Mac-

Rae, "Slimy Mac" to the legal profession for his genius at slipping his clients through legal loopholes other attorneys missed.

MacRae said, "That's breaking and entering, Shayne."

"But obviously without intent to commit burglary," the detective replied. "How about trespassing instead?"

"Knock it off, fellows," said Meadows. "Help yourself to a drink, Shayne." This with a nod toward a well equipped cellar on a sunporch corner. Then, "As a matter of fact, I've been trying to convince Mac we should contact you."

"Thanks, Meadows." Shayne helped himself. There was no Martell, so he settled for a belt of Napoleon on the rocks. "Is that why you put that dog on my tail?"

Meadows sighed. "I've been against that from the first, as has Mac."

The attorney nodded. Mike Shayne said, "Then who . . . ?"

Meadows opened his mouth to reply. MacRae gestured him to silence, said, "Let me tell it. Shayne, I don't know whether you are aware of it or not, but my client is not entirely alone in his desire to obtain deserved retribution from the *Daily News*."

"If you mean Ryan Akanian, I already know."

Meadows slapped a thigh, said, "I told you, Mac. You've got to get up mighty early in the morning to get ahead of Mike Shayne. Yes, it's Akanian. He wants to pick up the *News* for a song. But . . ."

A pause and again MacRae took over. "We don't like Akanian's methods. We don't believe this violence is helping our case. Even if it proves legally defensible, it can't help but create a climate unfavorable to us before a jury."

"What do you want *me* to do?" Shayne asked.

"We want you to go to Akanian, tell him to call off his dogs before anyone else gets killed," said Meadows.

"Why don't you go see him yourself?" said the detective. "I'm not your bird dog."

Meadows and MacRae looked at one another and sighed. The attorney said, "Don't think we haven't tried. But once committed to a course of action, Ryan is—well, hard to change."

"Ruthless is the word," said Meadows. "Shayne, he scares us."

The redhead said, "What I don't understand is how the murder of Cathy Whiting helps your case."

Another exchanged look between the two men, then, from Meadows, "That's what we've been trying to tell Akanian. He

insists there's no way the Whiting murder can be connected with our case."

"He's right on that," MacRae agreed. "But it creates a bad court climate." He shook his head.

"What do you want me to do to him?" the detective asked. He was amused by this turn of events. Also, he wanted to know where Akanian could be reached.

"Make him listen to reason, Shayne. Then, maybe we can get this thing settled."

"Where do I reach Akanian?"

"The Royal Pineapple," said MacRae. "The Presidential suite."

Mike Shayne finished his brandy and left. As he recrossed the lawn, he pondered the unreality of the scene just behind him. Were Meadows and MacRae playing a game or were they really as worried and bewildered as they seemed? Why had there been no query as to the fate of the thickset man in the houndstooth sports jacket? Above all, what on earth was their motive in requesting him to visit Ryan Akanian?

Good questions all—but where were the answers? Nor had there been mention of Myra Rainey. Why not? This made it a full quartet.

Shayne considered releasing

he garage door so the thickset man could get out. Then he decided against it. No sound came from within, so the detective assumed his follower was still unconscious. The piece of wood was still in place. The redhead got into the Buick, started it and drove off.

He was not followed this time.

When Shayne reached the approach of South Bayshore Drive, he pulled over, parked and used the car radio-telephone to call Roy Latimer. When he told the *News* publisher that MacLae had hinted at a willingness to settle the case, Latimer snorted and said, "To hell with that. If they're chickening out now, we hit them all the harder."

Shayne repeated their request that he visit Ryan Akanian, and Latimer told him to go ahead. "See what you can make of him," the publisher said. "What about Myra Tainey?"

"Dead ended again," the redhead replied. "You got anything on her?"

"Negative, Shayne. But Mrs. Fowler, the landlady, got in. I'm was there when she landed. She claims to know nothing about any of it. She's with the police now for what it's worth."

"I might drop by her house

later. I have the damnedest feeling about that place—that we've been missing something all along."

"Could be, I suppose," said the publisher. "But you'd better take a crack at Akanian first."

"If he'll see me. He's probably well barricaded."

Before resuming his drive, Shayne called the Royal Pineapple. He did not get through to the newspaper owner, but a secretary—male—informe him that his call was expected and that Mr. Akanian would receive him at 8:30 that evening.

Curiouser and curiouser, he reflected à la *Alice in Wonderland*. The date allowed him ample time for dinner, so he headed for The Beef House again, parking in the space behind it.

XI

TIM ROURKE WAS in his usual booth and Shayne slid onto the opposite bench. The lanky reporter was picking at the remnants of a large platter of spare ribs and sauerkraut, with a boilermaker, two thirds empty, alongside.

"You talked to the Fowler broad?" the detective asked when laconic greetings had been exchanged and a double

Martell and steak sandwich had been ordered.

Rourke shrugged, toyed with his tumbler, said, "If you could call it that. At the airport. She gave us a little speech—a set piece. Len Sturgis had his boys there and they whisked her away for questioning."

"Why? She can't be a suspect."

"For b.g. info on the Whiting kid—I've got a hunch, too, that they're looking for Myra Rainey."

"Figures," said Shayne. "How long ago?"

The reporter looked at his wristwatch, said, "About two hours back. A little less, actually."

"Then she's probably still at Headquarters," the redhead thought out loud. "What did she tell you?"

"That she hardly knew the girls well. Says she went to college with Myra's mother and was glad to rent them the smaller house. Said they were fine girls, good tenants. Couldn't imagine why anyone would want to kill either of them. She cut short her Bermuda trip when she heard the news. Said she was very distressed."

"Understandable." Shayne nodded. "Anything else?"

"Not much." Rourke hesitated, then, "She did give me her phone number. Said it was

unlisted. The tip was, if there were further interviews with the press, she'd prefer to conduct them over the phone."

"What was your impression of her, Tim?" Shayne took a hearty belt of his double Martell.

"Forty-ish, blonde, good enough looking. She's a double divorcée and not hurting for money."

"And she said she didn't know the girls well?"

"That's what she said." The reporter shrugged again.

"You don't believe her?"

"Mike, at the moment, I have no opinion either way. Are you onto anything?"

Shayne gave his old friend a concise account of his day's activities. Rourke's eyebrows rose.

"You've got another button man after you?" Tim shook his head. "For Christ's sake, be careful. I didn't get you into this to be wasted." A pause, then, "A damn shame you didn't catch up with Rainey."

"I will, Tim."

His steak sandwich arrived, steaming hot and redolent of its own rich juices. Before he tackled it, the detective said, "By the way, what's the Fowler woman's number?"

Rourke got out his notes and gave it to Shayne. Something rang a gong in recent memory. A number—scrawled in pencil on

he wall of the girls' cottage—a umber whose glitter had aught his eye when it reflected the sun's light that morning. There could have been a variety of legitimate reasons for the Whiting-Rainey pair to have Mrs. Fowler's unlisted number.

But the houses were so close that a loud whisper should be communication enough. And the landlady had told the press at the airport that she was not close to the girls. Somehow, the redhead thought, it didn't quite ring true.

A call from Carl Dirkson got the reporter on his way to follow another lead. Shayne finished his steak sandwich with a second double Martell, then paid his tab and departed for the Royal Pineapple, one of the newest Miami Beach hotels.

He was passed on by three separate underlings, two male, one female, before being ushered into the presence of Ryan Akanian, who received him on a glassed-in terrace of an imposing suite.

From Roy Latimer's fulminations against the rival publisher, Mike Shayne was expecting to meet a small, wiry, nervous Napoleon type, another little monarch of all he surveyed. Instead, Ryan Akanian was tall—perhaps an inch taller than the detective—and burly. His slacks and shirt looked off-



the-rack in contrast to the tailored elegance the redhead had imagined.

The only similarity between preconception and reality was that both versions of Ryan Akanian were visibly nervous. This was revealed by the way in which the publisher kept running a hand over the left side of his head, and by the mound of half-smoked cigarillos in the large crystal ashtray at his elbow.

The tall man rose from an armchair to greet the detective cordially, had a drink bought for him, explaining apologeti-

caly, "I'd join you if I could. Unfortunately, I'm not allowed."

Shayne nodded his sympathy, said, "I gather Meadows and MacRae informed you I wanted to see you. Incidentally, I am here with my client's knowledge and approval."

Akanian nodded slowly, studied the detective as he sipped his drink. When Shayne put his glass down, the big publisher said, "I've heard of you, of course. That's why I allowed you this visit. Your reputation has spread to far more than Miami."

Shayne shrugged, said nothing, until Akanian added, "To what do I owe this honor?"

The redhead moved to the attack. "We have just discovered that you're the man who's bankrolling Carl Meadows. My principal seems to feel there is a question of ethics involved."

"Ethics schmethics!" Akanian exploded. "The newspaper game is dog eat dog like any other business."

"Up to and including murder?"

The publisher snorted, said, "How the hell do you think Al Capone got to Chicago? Back in the Twenties, Hearst and Colonel MacCormick were battling it out and the going got rough. It was Hearst's circulation manager who went to Johnny Torrio and asked for some

likely boys to keep the *Examiner* on the streets. So Torrio imported a few New York guns. Capone was one of them."

"Then you condone the Cathy Whiting killing?" the redhead asked softly.

"Shayne," said the publisher, "I wish to hell I'd never got into this tug of war with Roy Latimer. He's really a nice little man. I've got nothing against him personally. And now, with violence erupting . . ." He let it hang.

"Why did you become involved?" the Shayne inquired.

"The way Meadows presented it to me, it looked like too good an opportunity to pass up. I've been hunting for a Southeastern property for years to round out my chain of newspapers. This looked like a ripe apple, just waiting to be plucked."

"So why stay involved?" the detective pressed.

"I'm in too deep. With men like Meadows and MacRae, it's not so easy to pull out. Having that poor girl killed the way they did—hell, she hadn't done anything . . ."

He shook his head, his lips pressed tight.

Shayne said, "Meadows and MacRae claim they had nothing to do with it."

"Those bastards! My God, Shayne, do you think I'd knowingly risk compromising a

lifetime of empire building by ordering a cheap shot like that."

"Button men are not cheap these days," the detective reminded him.

"I'm not joking!" Anger flushed the publisher's face. "And I didn't order anyone killed or even threatened."

"Somebody did." The redhead got to his feet. "I wonder who it could have been."

Mike Shayne walked off the terrace and out of Ryan Akanian's suite, battling his own erupting temper. Somebody was behind the threats that had caused Myra Rainey to go into hiding. Somebody was behind the capper who had slain Cathy Whiting, who had twice nearly killed Shayne and finally been killed by the detective.

Somebody, he decided, was going to pay through the nose.

Waiting for the down elevator from the publisher's lofty terrace suite with its view of the Bay and the city beyond, the detective took a series of deep breaths to restore his composure.

It occurred to him that this strange business of the visit to Ryan Akanian might have been a setup for the new hit man in town. He felt his hackles rise again as he waited in the basement garage for the attendant to bring his Buick around.

All at once, he felt exposed, naked to the world in that shadowy underground area.

As he waited, the telephone number he had seen on the cottage wall that morning rose again in his mind's eye to plague him. There was a public pay phone against the garage wall, almost at his elbow, and the detective decided to try it before his car came around.

Shayne dialed the seven digits, listened to the electronic chimes that revealed he was dialling a toll number. Then the operator came on to request twenty-five cents, which Shayne paid. The call was put through.

After seven rings, a feminine voice said, "Hello?"

"Who is this?" he asked. Somehow, it didn't sound like the voice of the Mrs. Fowler Tim Rourke had described to him.

"Who is *this*?" came the counter.

"Mike Shayne. I've been trying to get in touch with Myra Rainey for the last few days."

"Mike Shayne . . . the private detective?"

"Right. I'm working for Roy Latimer, the *Daily News* publisher. We want to—"

She interrupted him, saying, "This is Myra Rainey, Mr. Shayne. Can you get out here right away? I'm afraid."

That was all. She hung up his hand on the butt of his .45 before he could answer.

XII

MIKE SHAYNE DROVE to the quiet street in Coconut Grove a good deal more rapidly than the law allowed. He was not tailed this time, nor did anyone interfere with him in any way when he reached the old pine house. He drove past it until he found a driveway two hundred yards further on. There he turned in, cut his lights and, after a few moments, backed the Buick out in darkness, idled it silently forward to park a mere fifty yards from the fine old pine dwelling house.

If, indeed, there was another button man on the loose, it seemed unwise to take needless chances.

He approached the house cautiously, hugging the thick undergrowth closely as he moved quietly toward the pine dwelling, slipping from palm bole to palm bole. The darkness, like the stillness surrounding him, could well have been cut with a knife.

The blinds of the house were drawn tightly, so tightly that no light, if there was light inside, escaped. The detective moved against its front, attaining the railed porch without making much noise. He kept

his hand on the butt of his .45 as he moved.

But Mike Shayne made enough sounds to be heard. When he reached the front door with its brass knocker, a soft voice from just inside whispered, "Who's there?"

"Mike Shayne," he replied in matching tones. "I just called you, remember? Within the last half hour."

The door was hurriedly unlocked after some fumbling, and the detective slipped inside. There was dim illumination from the rear of the dwelling, by which he could see that his admittor was a most attractive young woman in denims and a jersey that did justice to a willowy figure which included fine long legs.

"Thank God, you're here!" She extended a hand. "I'm Myra Rainey. I was afraid to let you in until you mentioned your call."

After relocking the door for her, the detective offered her a cigaret, which was gratefully accepted. Shayne lit up himself as he trailed her to an inside den without windows but with a single lighted lamp whose glow was invisible from outside. He noted with approval the pert features of Myra's tired face, crowned by a dark brown widow's peak, the easy grace of her walk and posture beneath

the nervousness revealed by her gestures.

"What should I do?" she said. "There was someone prowling around outside just before you called."

"Well, there's nobody now," Shayne told her. "The first thing to do is to call the police—something you should have done when this thing got started."

"I know," she said. "But I—well, I was bewildered and frightened. Mr. Meadows and Mr. MacRae warned me about their partner. They said he was absolutely ruthless. So, when the phone calls began, I ran away and hid."

"With Mrs. Michaels?" And, at her nod, "If you'd stuck around there a little longer, I'd have caught up with you. What made you bolt a second time?"

"The more I thought about what happened to Cathy, the more frightened I got. I just didn't feel safe there—and I didn't want Mrs. Michaels to get hurt. So, when the street was empty, I took off."

"What brought you back here, Myra?"

"It seemed the safest place—I mean, it must have been searched and everything. Who'd look for me here? Besides, Mrs. Fowler left me the key—in case of emergency."

Shayne nodded. He could fol-

low that thinking. He said, "Where's the telephone, Myra?"

"Why?"

"I'm going to call the police."

"Why—I mean, with *you* here?"

Shayne spelled it out for her. "A—they can give you a lot better protection than I can if anyone *is* out to get you. B—they want Cathy Whiting's killer, and if you don't come in, they might put you through the wringer for obstructing a Homicide investigation."

As he followed the girl, he said, "How well did you and Mrs. Fowler know each other?"

"Gertrude Fowler? She and my mother were college sorority sisters. And she's been awfully nice to Cathy and me, until . . ." She let it hang.

"Until what, Myra?"

"Oh, until all these awful things started to happen. Just because I told that reporter—Mr. Rourke—the truth about my boss. Then Gertrude took off for Bermuda and the threatening phone calls began."

Mike Shayne nodded in the dim light of the main hall of the old house. Tim had been right about Mrs. Fowler delivering a set piece to the press and, probably, the police. Her reasons for taking a trip at just this time might, he thought, prove interesting.

He picked up the telephone

in the dimly lighted hall. It was dead as mutton . . .

The detective took another deep breath. The instrument had worked perfectly when he called Myra Rainey from The Golden Pineapple aparking garage, not much more than forty minutes before. And there had been no intruders in evidence when he made his careful entrance to the old house.

'Surely, if anyone had been out there then, a move would have been made against him. Which meant . . .

. . . that somebody was out there right now, somebody who had crippled their communications by cutting off the phone. His hand moved toward his left lapel.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Checking my cannon." He suited action to words, added, "Just in case."

"Why, Mr. Shayne? What makes you think—"

"The phone is dead." He cut her off. "That's what. Stay under cover while I reconnoiter."

Myra subsided on a small settee in a corner. As he moved toward a front window, the redhead could hear her teeth chatter. Pulling the shade aside a fraction of an inch, Shayne peered out. A big car was drawn up, nose-in to the drive-

way. He could just make out a human figure behind the wheel.

At that instant, the car lights were turned on full, bathing the facade of the old house with their glare. Mike Shayne fired two snap shots, each followed by the tinkle of falling glass. One headlight and part of the windshield were out of action.

Then some sort of repeating weapon began firing at the house on half-automatic. Yelling, "*Stay put!*" at the terrified girl, the detective raced to the rear of the dwelling, plunged down the back steps and sprinted to the smaller house.

He recalled how, two nights earlier, he had been flummoxed by the hit man's making a noise at the back door, then leaving by the front while he had the detective decoyed. But he did not quite make it undetected.

He was in the act of yanking open the front door when a rifle crashed its deadly message from the street end of the driveway. A steel jacketed message that tugged at his right shoulder as he crashed through the hinged barrier.

For a very good reason, this infuriated the redhead. He had paid close to two hundred dollars for this sports jacket less than two weeks before. Another bullet followed him inside, whining over his head to thud

into the far wall and Shayne went to his hands and knees.

He made the telephone, sitting on the floor, dialed operator and waited, seemingly an eternity, until the voice replied. Two other bullets smashed into the little house before he got his message through to the Police.

Then, coming up into a crouch with gun still cocked and ready, Mike Shayne prepared to counterattack.

Swiftly and silently, he went to the rear door and on through, during a lull for re-loading. He recalled the barbecue pit that had so nearly proved his undoing two nights earlier and slid into it.

When a dark form came around the corner of the smaller house, the redhead brought him down with a bullet in the knee, then rose and disarmed him. It was Carl Meadows, and he was out like a light. Shayne regarded him with distaste, then looked up just in time to see another shape emerge around the other rear corner of the building.

"Okay," the detective said. "Drop the cannon. Nice and easy. Kick it over here. Okay. Now sit down and stay down."

XIII

THE DINNER, SERVED in Roy



Latimer's private dining room atop the *News* building, was strictly a stag affair. Shayne was there, of course, as were the three defendants in the now

defunct criminal libel case. So also was Ryan Akanian, who had made handsome atonement to Latimer for his fall from grace.

Mostly, it was Mike Shayne who fielded the questions.

"I wondered about Myra Rainey not calling in the police. Len Sturgis' Homicide boys dug out the reason. It seems, when she was a teenager, she got picked up for trying to shoplift an evening gown for a high school formal. Seems her mother wouldn't let her wear a strapless, so she went out and took one.

"The parents asked the police to throw a scare into her, and they did their job a little too well. Rainey's had copaphobia ever since."

There were questions about Carl Meadows, who was recovering in a prison hospital ward from the shattered knee Shayne had given him, about Allen MacRae, who was languishing in the pen under impossibly high bail.

"They worked it together," the detective told his small audience, "but my hunch is that Meadows was the idea man, Slimy Mac the how-to-do-it boy. Is that how it seemed to you, Ryan?"

The publisher nodded, said, "I still don't know how I fell for such a flagrant con. Sheer

greed, I guess. But I think you called it right, Mike. And, once again, I want to thank you for what you did the other night."

"We all want to thank you, Mike." Roy Latimer was on his feet, wine glass lifted. The toast was drunk and Mike, fingering the stem of his goblet, longed for Martell instead of another in the series of expensive wines that had accompanied the dinner.

"The one I don't understand," said Latimer, "is the Fowler woman. She doesn't make sense to me."

"She made sense by her own lights," Mike Shayne assured his client. "She couldn't turn down a luxury trip to Bermuda, which Meadows offered her because he wanted her out of town. She loved the island and he knew it. Once Fowler was there and learned about Cathy Whiting's murder, she realized why she'd been lured away. So she figured the wisest course was to clam up and pretend she knew nothing about it. Which, in a way, she didn't."

"How are your friends at Headquarters taking that?" Roy Latimer asked Shayne.

"They're sullen but not mutinous. After all, she didn't actually *do* anything illegal. There's no charge on the books for accepting a free trip to Bermuda."

"What about Myra Rainey?" Carl Dirkson asked. "How is she taking it?"

"Right now she's hitting bottom," the redhead replied. "She's still sick about Cathy Whiting's murder. She feels wholly responsible. But Myra is blessed with the resiliency of the young. My guess is that she'll get over it—but probably not around here. She's had a bellyful of Miami, and I can't blame her for that."

Roy Latimer looked puzzled. "You know," he said, "I still can't figure out why the Whiting girl was killed."

"According to Meadows, before the police took him away, that wasn't supposed to happen," Shayne told him. "They had the apartment wire tapped and, as I thought, Myra did call Cathy to let her know she was okay and to find out what was happening. They sent the button man around to force her to tell them where Rainey was. They took it for granted she must know—which she didn't."

"He was leaning on her pretty hard when I drove up and headed straight for the little house in back. He figured it was a trap and opened fire to keep her from talking to me—just about the way I figured it. Then he opened fire on me."

"You were lucky, Shayne," said Akanian.

Tim Rourke looked at the larger publisher, said, "I used to think that about Mike—but he's survived too many scrapes like this to call it all luck. He's quick, and he seems to have a sixth sense for impending danger."

The detective said, "Whatever it is, I'm grateful for having it. But considering I heard the shots that killed Cathy, I was a damned fool to try and crash the house. I should have waited him out or called the police from my car."

"You're second-guessing yourself," the reporter told him, "to say nothing of revealing unbearable modesty."

"What's the word on Lowman?" the redhead asked.

Roy Latimer put down his wine glass. "I'm told he'll recover. It seems discovering what looked like mere legal chicanery had turned into murder was more than he could take. But he'll never practice law again." A pause, then, "Incidentally, Shayne, the paper is happy to express its gratitude, as are Tim, Carl and myself."

The envelope he handed Mike Shayne was reassuringly thick. When he opened it later, he discovered fifteen thousand-dollar bills, ten more than the fee he had been promised.

On the whole, he felt he had earned it.

A CASE FOR CURIOSITY

by WYC TOOLE

CHARLIE JOHNSON saw the flashing red lights of the police cars at the Anderson home about six-thirty in the morning. It was almost three hours later, however, before he found out about the dead woman.

There were two reasons for this—one, pride—the other, stubbornness. Neither of which were real strangers to Charlie's nature. So, considering the way things happened, it is surprising that he learned about her death soon enough to do something about it.

Perhaps this just goes to prove that curiosity is a stronger emotion than either pride or stubbornness. On the other hand, it may only tell something about Charlie. But whatever the case, he first saw the rotating lights while he was eating breakfast.

To most people, breakfast is a time for sitting and enjoying the morning meal. But, since Sarah died, Charlie used it as a

period for wandering and snacking, for admiring the house, checking the yard, in general getting ready for the day ahead. That is why the lanky old man was carrying a half-eaten bowl of cornflakes and a luke-warm cup of strong coffee in his big hands when he came out of the cool dark living room and squinted at the early morning sun.

Charlie liked this time of day. The world just waking up. The lake shining. Grass smelling green and warm. The sharp flat random sounds of jumping fish and birds starting to fly. All the familiar comforting sights and sounds of his forty years of living on the lake.

Forty years! Charlie thought. Don't seem possible I been clean that long. I might get to heaven yet.

Getting to heaven worried Charlie. He was sure that was where Sarah was—so, that's where he wanted to go. The

Charlie didn't want the neighbors to know about his past. But when Vera Platt was found shot to death right across the lake, Old Charlie could not resist the puzzle presented by her death.



trouble was there had been a time when he was young and angry and made his living killing people. A free agent working for anyone with enough money to pay his fees—a target that was mean enough and clever enough to make the hunt exciting and bad enough to make the police less than industrious in looking for the one that did it.

Sarah had changed all that and brought him to the lonely, sleepy lake in central Florida both to hide and live. Now he was old and Sarah was gone and he stood on the porch barefooted, wearing faded overalls and a clean blue work shirt, wondering if he would ever get up there with her. This lonely thought soon faded back among his other gentle memories and Charlie took in a deep breath of the fresh morning air and sipped his coffee.

Patches of his thick white hair were drying and starting to escape in random tufts from the two handfuls of water he had used to glue them down and his lined brown face was still shining from the sharp edge of the old straight razor he used. Flecks of shaving soap were stuck in the deep folds of his ear lobes, giving him a fresh clean fragrance, and his pale blue eyes were warm with an expression of satisfaction.

The weather was beautiful and he felt it was going to be a fine day.

The sight of the red lights, however, changed his satisfied expression to one of intense curiosity. Such activity was not common in this quiet corner of the county. Only twice in recent years had he seen such a sight. Once when he had been forced to fall back on his old skills to remove a man that had come to kill his young neighbor and favorite of all people alive—Jan Semmes. This man had made a bad mistake and paid for it. The other, when the County Sheriff came to Charlie for help in solving a murder. Rumors of his strange talents were spreading through the area. Charlie did not like that too much.

Without taking his eyes off the rotating lights, Charlie bent slightly, carefully set the coffee on a low wooden table, shoveled another spoonful of cereal into his wide mouth and padded soundlessly over the wooden boards. Then he stood in front of the screen door, chewing thoughtfully and trying to make out what was taking place.

It was less than half a mile across the jutting finger of Lake Kachimee that separated his house from the Andersons', but the distance was such that

he couldn't see too much. The cars looked like toys and the people moving around in the yard were little more than sticks of color. It was also hard to see because the lake was rippling gently under a soft breeze and the warm morning sun made the whole surface of the lake glitter and sparkle as if handfuls of diamonds had been scattered over it.

Charlie stood squinting across the restless water until the bright flashes hurt his eyes enough to make him turn away. Then he blinked, rubbed his eyes hard and gave up in disgust.

"Getting weak. Guess you'll want sun glasses next!" he growled to his eyes, as if they were a separate person. "Well, you jus' forget it. We ain't that bad off yet. And whatever's happenin' ain't none 'a our business anyway." He spoke firmly, turning and walking back through the house and out into his small orange grove.

Twice more during the morning, curiosity pulled him back to the front of the house where he could watch the random activity still going on over at the Andersons'. But each time the heavy pride of old age drove him back to his oranges. "If anybody wanted you over there, they'd call," he told himself sharply.

As the day wore on, however, he reached the point where he was too hot and bored with the routine work to fight off his curiosity any longer. Even Jan Semmes and her children were gone for the day. Finally, he gave up and, cursing himself for a senile old fool, Charlie walked around the house, down to the dock and climbed into his small fishing boat. The well-oiled motor caught with the first pull of the cord and he swung away from the landing in a shallow semicircle toward the Anderson house.

"Sometimes people don't even know when they need you," he assured himself, heading toward the excitement.

When Charlie killed the motor and coasted alongside the Anderson dock, Lester Gilman, the county sheriff was waiting for him. As he caught the line Charlie threw to him, Lester smiled around his cigar and said, "I been wondering how long 'fore you'd show up, Charlie."

"Yeah, I'm like an old cat. Cain't stand not to know what's goin' on."

Lester stuck out his hand and pulled Charlie onto the pier, all the while chewing fiercely on the stub of his soggy cigar. As usual, his tie was pulled loose, his grey cowboy hat was pushed to the back of his head and his

dark suit looked as if he had been living in it for at least a week.

"Then I might not be the one you want'a see, Charlie, 'cause I ain't sure myself," Lester admitted. "Looks like a suicide."

"Then why didn't you call me?"

"Probably would have," Lester smiled, "but you get all bent out'a shape every time I do."

Charlie glared at Lester, his thick white eyebrows hooding his pale blue eyes. "Only when you devil me with all that fool gossip 'bout me being some kind'a criminal."

Lester shrugged and grinned. "You sure hold a grudge, don't you? All I said was there's a rumor in Miami that you were a big man in the mobs one time and you get all excited."

"Well, wouldn't you?" Charlie snapped.

"I don't know, I ain't never been big in the mobs," Lester laughed. "Here, where you going?" he called as Charlie started to climb back in his boat.

"Home! Where I ain't gonna be insulted by no small town sheriff. That's where!"

"Come on, Charlie," Lester pleaded. "Don't get all het up. That stuff ain't none'a my business and I need some help like you gimme with that golf course case."

Charlie paused and crawled back up on the dock. "Aw-right", Charlie agreed. "But don't you make no more bad remarks about my character!"

"I promise!" Lester smiled.

Charlie eased himself down onto one of the dock pilings and said, "Whatcha mean it *looks*' like a suicide?"

The sheriff shifted the cigar butt to the other side of his mouth and said thoughtfully, "That's about the only way I know to put it right now. There's a lady up in the house with a bullet in her and the gun it came out of is in her right hand."

"Where's the bullet?"

"In her chest. Jus' under the left breast. Got the heart. She died pretty quick."

"That's a funny place for a suicide shot, ain't it?" Charlie said, "Most people go for the head. And there's an awful lot'a water around here. Be a cleaner way to do it."

"Yeah," Lester agreed, "but who knows what goes through a person's mind when they pull a fool trick like that."

"Powder burns?"

"Plenty."

"She leave a note?"

"Maybe," Lester said flatly, spitting out a soggy piece of cigar butt.

"What the hell you mean, 'maybe'?" Lester, ain't you

looked good at nothin'?" Charlie yelled.

"Course I have! But that don't mean I got answers. You call this a suicide note? And you handle it easy!"

Charlie took the small piece of paper Lester handed him carefully by the edges and looked at both sides of it. One side was blank. The other had writing on it. The top and bottom of the page had been cut off above and below the beginning and ending sentences.

I'm sorry, the note read. I never meant for things to end this way, but I guess it has to be Charlie saw there was no period to end the last sentence.

"Ain't much of a note, is it?" Lester asked.

"Shore ain't," Charlie agreed. "Where's the rest of it?"

"That's all there is," Lester told him. "There were some ashes in an ashtray we're checking that looked like she might have burned the parts she cut off. But why she'd do a crazy thing like that, I'm damned if I know." Lester shifted the soggy cigar butt in his mouth and said wearily "Come on, Charlie. Let's walk up to the house."

The two men strolled up the dock and across the thick green lawn, one young, short, stocky and rumpled, the other old, tall, lean and rumpled.

"You ain't mentioned the husband yet," Charlie said thoughtfully. "And I know there is one. Bart Anderson told me he was renting his place to some newlyweds 'fore he and Beth left for Europe."

"Oh yeah." Lester nodded, "there's a husband all right."

"Where was he when the shootin' went on?"

"In a motel. With a girl friend."

"You're kiddin' me."

"Not a bit," Lester assured him. "He's up at the house now."

"Will he talk about it?"

"Talk! God, that's all he does. That's why I was down on the dock. I got sick'a listenin' to him. You wonder how a woman ever gets mixed up with a man like that. He don't even pretend to be sorry she shot herself. Says he feels bad, but they was gettin' a divorce anyway."

"Did he say how much alimony she wanted?"

Lester laughed. "Alimony! Hell, he ain't got two nickels of his own. If there was any alimony gonna be given out, she'd sure as hell be the one to give it."

"She had money?" Charlie asked interestedly.

"The man says three million. He can't even sit still when he talks about it, he gits so excited."

"So yesterday he's broke and today he's a millionaire. Lester, that is a *convenient* suicide."

"Charlie," Lester said firmly, "I couldn't agree with you more. But unless you got any better ideas than me, that's exactly what it's got to be!"

"Now, suppose you jus' explain that remark." Charlie snorted.

"'Cause nobody could git in the house to kill 'er. That's why!" Lester insisted. "It was locked up tight from the inside."

"Look, Lester," Charlie said patiently. "With a key, you can get in any house. And if you don't have a key, you can pick the lock. If you don't like those ways, you can climb through windows. Don't tell *me* nobody could get in."

"Well, that's what I *am* telling *you*," Lester said firmly. "Every window and door in that house was bolted from the inside."

Charlie paused and said thoughtfully to Lester, "That sounds pretty interestin'. Maybe we better sit down and you tell me what you know about this thing right from the be-ginnin'."

Lester nodded and led Charlie over to a round white lawn table with a brightly colored umbrella in the center. It was on the edge of a large patio. Off

to one side, a big outdoor barbecue pit was under construction. They sat down in uncomfortable white metal chairs and Lester pulled out a small notebook.

HE SCANNED IT for a minute, then said, "The dead woman's name is Vera Platt. Two 't's. She was thirty-eight years old, five feet six inches tall and weighed one hundred thirty-five. Brown hair, brown eyes, sallow skin. Rather a plain woman from her pictures. But she had a lot'a money."

"Her husband is a man named Willard Platt. He's twenty-nine years old, six feet one inch tall and goes about one hundred ninety. Nice build, blond hair, grey eyes and a beach-boy tan. In fact, that's what he was—a beach boy. Vera met him in Miami about six months ago. He was a life guard at one of the big hotels on the beach."

"After she got him dressed properly and hung enough gold on his wrists and neck to get his attention, she married him. Seems to be a case of her seeing something she wanted and buying it."

"She was a little greedy, I guess, and Miami had too many distractions for him. So she rented this place where she could have him to herself for a while."

Or at least, that's what Willard says.

"Problem was, he couldn't stand the quiet and imported a little blonde to fill in the loose hours. He kept her in town in that new motel. About two weeks ago, Vera found out about his sideline and laid down some new laws. Willard says she needed him a lot more than he needed her, so he jus' told her what-she could do with her new rules and gave her *his* ultimatum. She could share, but she couldn't own.

"He was so darlin' and sweet, however, she couldn't stand the thought of only sharing him and last night they had a big fight about it. Willard says she threatened to kill herself, but he didn't believe her and walked out. Went to town and kept warm with his girl. She backs up Willard's story and swears they were together from nine o'clock last night 'til they left the motel together this morning at five-thirty to come out and pick up his clothes."

Lester chewed on his cigar and checked his notebook again.

"The two 'a them got here before six and couldn't get in. The doors were all bolted from the inside. Willard says he poked around a bit and finally, through the front window, saw his wife lying on the floor in

the living room. They drove back to that filling station over on the county road and called us. I got here at six-twenty."

Lester closed the notebook and stuck it in his pocket. "I couldn't git in either. There are three solid doors on the house and they were all bolted from the inside. All the windows—they're those jalousie things that are too narrow to crawl through anyway—were also locked from inside. I had to bust in the front door.

"Vera Platt was dead, shot once in the chest. She had a thirty-two revolver in her right hand that had been fired one time."

"Was she dressed?" Charlie interrupted.

"Yes and no," Lester told him. "She had on a full-length dressing gown, but nothing under it."

Charlie nodded and Lester continued, "I found the note on a coffee table beside her. And now you know everything I do."

"Which is all conflictin'!"

"Un-huh." Lester nodded. "Everything about this mess points to a murder but the killing itself. Hell, if anybody got arrested for Vera Platt's murder, I'd be the best defense witness they could get. That house was shut up tight and it's the only way I could testify. In the short time I've known him, I've

developed a real dislike for Willard, but I'm afraid it's gotta come out suicide whether I like it or not."

Charlie stood up and flexed his bare toes in the dry grass. "You mind if I look around some?" he asked Lester.

"No, you go right ahead. I'm jus' gonna sit here and be discouraged."

"By the way, Lester, who's building the barbecue pit?"

"Willard says he was doing it, 'cause Vera wanted one. Says he's damn glad he won't have to finish it."

Charlie nodded. "He sure is an honest one, ain't he," he told Lester as he walked away from the table.

For the next half hour Charlie wandered through and around the low, rambling home. It was a typical Florida lake house. Cinder block construction—three bedrooms and an attached garage. The windows were small and high with glass jalousies set in aluminum. The securing bolts were inside the house. None of them could have been removed and replaced from the outside.

There were only three ways into the house. Charlie was convinced no one could have entered there. The second way was through two huge sliding glass doors that faced on the lake. According to Lester, they

had been locked and chained and a long metal rod inserted into the sliding groove as a blocking bolt.

Charlie satisfied himself the glass was intact and that there was no way to remove them from the outside. Obviously no one could have entered through them. The last way into the house was through the garage and then into the kitchen. But, you had to get into the garage first through a hinged wooden door that slid up into tracks set in the garage roof. It could not be tampered with from the outside and it had been bolted also.

Charlie walked onto the cool concrete floor of the garage and stood with his hands in the pockets of his overalls, thinking. It was a clean neat garage, holding a small foreign car, a few garden tools and a rough set of wooden shelves against the black wall. The shelves were covered with bottles, paint cans, tools, and the usual debris people move out of a house into a storage area. Charlie checked the tracks that held the garage door in place. Once he made certain they were solid and untouched, he wandered aimlessly through the connecting kitchen door into the house.

He was standing in the living room looking at the blood-soaked rug where Vera Platt

had died when a smile crossed his old face. "Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered. "Looked right at it and didn't see it!" He headed out the front door in a loping run.

About ten minutes later, he walked back to the white lawn table where Lester was sitting and talking with a man Charlie had not seen before. They both stood up when he arrived.

"Charlie," Lester said, "this is Mr. Holcombe. He's Mrs. Platt's brother. He just arrived and I've told him the way things look."

Lester then turned to Holcombe and noticing the expression on his face said, "Mr. Holcombe this is Mr. Johnson. He may not look like much standing there in overalls and barefoot, but he owns this county and knows more about criminal investigations than any two detectives I've ever met. I believe he'll back me up on the suicide verdict since he's had a chance now to look around."

Charlie smiled at Lester's backhanded compliment and asked "Where do you live, Mr. Holcombe?"

"In Palm Beach. And, despite what you say and believe Mr. Johnson, my sister did *not* commit suicide. I warned her about that man, but she would not listen. Last night, however,



she called and told me she was through with him. She asked me to drive up and help her move out of the house today. Believe me, there were no symptoms of suicide in her words. Only anger. That man Platt murdered Vera!" he finished heatedly.

"Mr. Holcombe," Lester broke in, "I know how you feel, but we have to deal with facts." He turned to Charlie. "Now that you've been up there, you see what I mean about the house and how no one could have gotten in to kill her. Don't you?"

"No," Charlie stated firmly. "Mr. Holcombe's right. In fact,

he just gave me the answer to the last question I couldn't handle. Platt *did* murder his wife and he *did* go in and out of that house last night. Come on up and I'll show you how he did it. Then you can arrest him. I think he'll talk plenty when you show him we're as smart as he is."

Charlie led the two men up towards the house. As they walked across the lawn he said, "As a matter of fact, looks to me like Platt's been planning to kill 'er for some time. That's why he started building that barbecue thing out by the patio. It bothered me when I first saw it. From all you told me, he didn't seem the type to build an outdoor barbecue, no matter who wanted it.

"But the thing that really hung me up for a while, was *why* would he kill 'er last night and then find the body so early this morning. If what I had figured out was right, he was smart enough to know he needed two or three days before he could be sure the plan would work. Now that Mr. Holcombe's told me what happened last night, it's obvious Platt lost control of the timing. He had to move fast and I suspect he wan't really worried we would find anythin' anyway. Probably figured the police around here wasn't that smart."

Lester took the soggy cigar butt out of his mouth and snapped, "I don't suppose Platt *could* be expected to know there was a bigger crook around here than he is!"

Charlie chuckled at the rise he had gotten out of the sheriff and continued happily, "Any-way. Whether he was in the house when his wife called you, Mr. Holcombe, or he got there later—don't make much difference. From the way she was dressed, I imagine it was later, when she was getting ready for bed. But whenever it was, he either heard, or she told him, she was leaving with you the next morning. He realized it was then or never for his plan. So, he went right to work.

"Since she wasn't expectin' it, I don't think it was any trouble for him to get up close and shoot her. In the head might have been hard to manage, but not the chest. Easy to control where the shot went and plenty of powder burns that way. Must'a got a lot 'a blood on himself, but 'less he's really dumb—and I doubt that—you won't find the clothes 'til he tells you where they are. Nobody notices a single shot this far out in the country. So he had time to clean up and change clothes. Plenty of 'em in the house."

By now, Charlie had led

them' into the living room. "He gets Vera laid out nice and proper with the gun in her hand and does the best he can for a note. Probably used an old letter or maybe she wrote him a note she was leaving. Whatever, he cuts the parts off that don't fit in and burns 'em in the ashtray. Bad as the note was, it qualified.

"Next he closes up the whole house, boltin' all the windows and doors. In fact, I bet you'll find he put all those bolts and chains on, himself. I don't ever remember Bart or Beth being that skittish 'bout being robbed.

"Last of all, he sets the lock on the kitchen door and pulls it shut behind him. It's locked, but not bolted. He covers that one openin' by boltin' the garage door and the house is sealed. No one can get in. All he has to do is get out and he's home free. If the house was shut up so nobody could get in, the only thing the law could find would be suicide. No matter how bad he looked."

Charlie motioned for the two men to follow him. "Lemme show you somethin' that might not work anywhere in the country but Florida." He led them to the back wall of the garage, bent down and began to move the bottles and paint cans to one side of the lower shelf.

"Look there," he said.

Lester bent down, stared at the wall and whistled. There was fresh cement holding four of the cinder blocks in place.

"See what I mean," Charlie asked. "Bare cinder blocks inside the garage. Nine houses out of ten in Florida are built that way. No worry about messin' up a paint job like in the house. Maybe he had those blocks already loose, or maybe he knocked 'em out right then. But one way or the other, he took out enough of 'em to make a hole he could squeeze through. Then, it was easy to reach back in and rearrange all this junk on the shelf to cover the area.

"'Cause a that barbecue pit he was building, he had all the material he needed to repair the wall. It was dark and he had plenty-a time. Nobody roams around out here at night. He mixed up some cement and bein' careful not to damage the shrubbery that covers the outside wall of the garage, he replaced the blocks, touched up the paint and went on back to the motel.

"You can still see the paint spots on the shrubs and grass. The paint's that fast-drying kind but the cement takes longer. If Holcombe hadn't been comin', he'd 'a waited a day or two for it to set good. He jus' didn't have that choice. Also, he

realized that it would be better for him to find Vera then let her brother do it. Not only would it be kind of a plus for him, but he could be around to talk enough to keep your attention on the doors and windows.

"Not a bad idea, was it!"

Charlie said admiringly.

Lester never answered. He went out of the garage on the dead run to arrest Willard Platt.

Later, Charlie was sitting in his boat, a few hundred yards off the Andersons' dock, fishing patiently, when Lester Gilman appeared and waved for him to come in. He started the motor, cruised slowly back alongside the pier, tied up his boat and climbed up on the weathered dock.

"Platt confess?" Charlie asked.

"Not right at first," Lester told him. "But when that little gal of his finally realized she

was getting mixed up in first degree murder, she really started talking. After that, he told us the whole thing. You figured it perfectly. Seemed kind 'a proud of his plan and pretty impressed we worked it out."

"We!" Charlie yelped.

"That's the official 'we,'" Lester grinned. "Don't forget, I'm the sheriff. I gotta get elected. Not you."

Charlie said a very bad word, crawled back in his boat and took off for the center of the lake. He still needed one more fish for supper.

As the motor hummed rhythmically, Charlie's mind wandered back in time, trying to remember what had happened to him in the past that helped him recognize Platt's plan. "Must'a been Chicago," he decided. "Not much difference in brickin' a body in than brickin' yourself out."

More on Next Month's Headliner

THE VERDICT WAS MURDER by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New Mike Shayne Short Novel



BAD GUYS ARE NICE

by
**ANITA
ZELMAN**

The young woman fell for the hijackers—but the older woman beside her knew the bitter truth.

"ISN'T HE WONDERFUL," Marcia said as she looked adoringly into the eyes of the hijacker who was passing our seats, his gun at the ready.

I waited until he was well past us and had gone back to the pilot's cabin.

"No, he's not wonderful. He's a rotten Dead End kid."

"What's a Dead End kid?"

Served me right for using references from the past. Marcia was such a young woman and I such a middle-aged one. I explained who the Dead End kids were.

"But he's not like that. He's polite and humanitarian, and really believes in his cause."

This is the sort of thing that my own daughter would have said and I wanted to shake this young woman sitting next to me, a girl who had been a stranger to me before I had boarded the plane.

"You didn't think that when these hoodlums, these thugs, first took over," I said. "You were as scared-and-angry-at-the-same-time as the rest of us."

"But that was before they ex-

plained why they were doing it."

"You're experiencing a common idiocy now that we're into our eighth hour, if my watch is right. It may have gone into shock when I did. Most hijackees are angry but a lot, like you, begin to think their captors are wonderful. Why do you think they're great, Marcia? Just because they haven't killed you yet?"

"I—well, I think they're so beautifully idealistic. They're willing to blow up the plane and themselves with it for the sake of their country if their demands aren't met. I liked what that one—you know, the one with the drooping mustache, who speaks with such spiritual intensity—said about his homeland."

"Oh, God, you mean that awful lecture he gave on his scroungy little country? I couldn't even point to it on a map if my life depended on it." I laughed bitterly at what I had just heard myself saying.

"I'll admit," Marcia said, "that I hadn't heard of it before today. My fault. We should learn to be more loving and caring about other places in this world, especially moneyed people like you and me."

"What makes you think I'm rich?"

This is a sensitive subject with me. I always pride myself

that I don't announce my money with clothes or jewelry. My diamonds, usually in the safe deposit box, are hopefully not getting dimmer by their confinement.

"We're both here in first class," Marcia said.

"True. But I could be an executive or a saleswoman of a corporation, traveling on company money."

"But you aren't," Marcia said. "You give away your wealth with that simple hairstyle. It takes time and money to get hair to fall like that."

"Guilty as charged. Do you think they'll treat us any the worse because we're in first class?" I asked.

"Oh, no, they've been terribly nice so far."

"Poor Marcia. You're brainwashed. Someone should do a study on whether rich hijackees are more apt to undergo identification with the aggressor than the people in coach. We rich carry a larger burden of guilt on our shoulders. I wonder if Mansley and Heisman, who did the study on *Bullying, Building Admiration Through Menace*, would be interested in doing such a piece?"

"You sound so knowledgeable. Is psychology of kidnap victims your hobby?"

"My dear, I've read every bit of information I can get on the

subject. Yes, it's a hobby, I suppose, but one that was forced on me by ugly circumstance."

Before Marcia could ask what ugly circumstance, our present ugly circumstance pressed in on us. We heard one of the hijackers clearing his throat over the loudspeaker system. Everyone in the cabin tensed. Would it be another of his political speeches, another tirade against oppressors? Perhaps it would be better to be blown up here and now than hear one of those speeches. No. I valued my life. I listened.

"You'll be glad to hear that the plane is about to descend," the hijacker said. "When we land, we'll be met with food and comfort. Do not attempt to leave the plane until Ché and Ben make arrangements. I'll let you know when that will be."

They had called each other by first names only from the beginning of the hijacking.

"I hope Ché and Ben are greeted with a swift kick in the pants," I said to Marcia.

"You don't *mean* that." She looked shocked. "I mean, not only for their sakes but for ours."

She would have put that in reverse eight hours earlier but now she was clearly rooting for them and I was reminded of the studies done about the airline passengers in Mindanao in the

Philippines, who shielded their hijackers from police trying to rescue the hijackees.

The wheels of the plane touched the ground and a collective sigh went up from the passengers. Our droopy-mustached hijacker, the one Marcia thought so humanitarian and idealistic, came out of the pilot's cabin and stood with his back to it, facing us, gun trained in the general direction of the passengers. Marcia was smiling gently, almost maternally, at him.

I looked out the window.

"What do you see?" Marcia asked, straining to peer over my shoulder.

"A couple of negotiators, I hope."

Two unarmed men dressed in business suits were approaching the plane across the spotlit field. My shoulder was blocking Marcia's view and I was about to pull back in my chair to let her have a chance to see when something caught my attention, a feeling of movement rather than movement itself somewhere on the ground, in the dark, past the nose of the plane.

Then I saw him, a man crouched and coming forward—no, several men—coming out of the darkness. I prayed that the hijackers hadn't seen them. But, of

course, logic told me, they hadn't. I could account for all four of them. Our idealist was standing right in front of us, Ché and Ben were standing at their open door somewhere in second class, getting ready to receive the two negotiators. The fourth hijacker had to be standing with a gun trained on the coach class passengers.

The only people who could have seen the stealthy movements were the pilot up in front and I. It would be our secret. I kept my shoulder in front of the window, continuing to hog the view. Let Marcia think I was rude and selfish in my excitement.

If Marcia knew, she'd snitch and prove my point. She'd be the epitome of the identification with the aggressor theory. God, how I had wanted that point to be proven in the past few months! I had yearned for it, hungered for it, I who had never in my life had trouble telling the good guys from the bad.

Then it hit me. It could be proven right now. It would mean risking my life for what I wanted the world to know—an awful risk to prove a point. It would mean helping these thugs, these Dead End-kids. But what publicity for the theory! The world was watching.

The men were coming closer and from where I sat you could see them now as men and not as shapes. I thought it over for two seconds. Then I decided it was no contest.

"Your turn to look out the window, Marcia," I said and leaned back.

Then it happened. Fast. Marcia looked and yelled the message to the hijacker. Without hesitation. The passenger across the aisle looked at Marcia with shock. The hijacker came forward and peered out our window as I cooperatively continued to press back in my chair, insuring his thorough view. Then, he ran down the aisle, past first class, yelling as he went. There were shouts, confusion.

I ducked to the floor, pulling Marcia down with me. People were screaming. Then it was over and I was still alive. Uniformed men came aboard and began to guide passengers off the plane.

I approached the modest airport, vaguely registering the name of the country I was in, but mostly making sure that the passenger who had been across the aisle from me got to the reporters first.

I dawdled behind the security guards and listened to a frustrated reporter filling in time with his introduction of me be-

fore he could get past the guard.

"I'm about to talk to her," he said. "This woman whose courage everyone has so admired as she has seen her share of tragedy, her only daughter, Angie, kidnapped nine months ago by the Symbiosis Libertarian Army, a case that so closely paralleled the Patty Hearst one.

"Angie announced to the public, that she, herself, had joined the group. Angie, as you know, was convicted last month, in spite of her mother's immense efforts in court to prove that the girl had been brainwashed by her captors.

"The irony of tonight's situa-

tion is that, as you've just heard in the interview with the passenger who sat across the aisle, Angie's mother was sitting next to a young woman who was so thoroughly brainwashed in the eight hours of the hijacking that she betrayed a whole plane load of people."

The reporter was past the guard now and no more introductions were necessary. The world not only knew me but in fact, had become pretty tired of me.

"Can you talk to us," he asked and thrust the microphone at me.

I smiled at him. "Yes, of course. I'll be glad to. I have something to say."

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*The kidnappers were caught,
their victim rescued—but
what became of the ransom
money? a \$30,000 conundrum!*

RANSOM

by

MICHAEL J. HANSON



THE CALDWELL KIDNAPPING was solved. It was a simple enough case, as kidnappings go. A couple of bunglers from the Midwest passing through town decided to kidnap a Tucson woman to get her husband to finance their trip to California. The Chief of the Tucson Police Department and the Sheriff of

Pima County worked hand in glove and, with an assist from the FBI fingerprint division, the two badmen were turned over to the Federal Attorney in Phoenix. What the courts would do with them was a different matter; the police had done their work.

The kidnappers hadn't made

much preparation for the job. They drove around till they came to a neighborhood with expensive homes and grabbed the first woman they saw that morning—Mrs. Harold Caldwell out walking her chihuahua in the desert near her home. They drove her to a motel at the other end of town, found out her name, terrorized her into writing a note to her husband and went about collecting the ransom. One stood guard over Mrs. Caldwell while the other took off in the car.

He drove to the Caldwell house and deposited the note in the mailbox. He then drove to a phone booth outside a MacDonald's fourteen blocks away and called Mr. Caldwell, getting him out of bed. He told him to look in his mailbox and hung up. He then drove thirty blocks to another booth and called Mr. Caldwell again. He told him to stay near the phone and wait for instructions. He warned him not to call the police if he wanted to see his wife alive.

When the kidnapper called the third time three Tucson officers were listening in on the call, one on the extension and two on special taps that had been installed on the Caldwell line. Experienced Mountain Bell operators were alerted to help the police trace calls into

the home. This call was specific.

"Get thirty thousand together in tens and twenties—no fives and no fifties. Get back to the phone and wait. Don't get any ideas about calling the police."

He hung up and three cops exhaled noisily. They were letting out the breath they had been holding during the phone conversation. They were also expressing their relief that the kidnapper didn't know the police had been called in.

Detective Lieutenant Koertz radioed police communications center on his portable radio. At the same time he was barking over the phone to the operator who was tracing the call, and he was questioning Mr. Caldwell. "Where'd the call come from? What do you mean, you haven't traced it yet? . . . Put me through to the dispatcher of mobile units . . . Where do you bank, Mr. Caldwell? . . . What do you mean, a public phone at the airport? I've got to know which one. Okay, I got it.

"Now get me the Sheriff's office . . . Clear the air. I've got to get a message out to all mobile units . . . What's that, Mr. Caldwell? Downtown Bank? All right . . . Get the nearest officer to Downtown Bank and tell him to requisition all the paper cutters and all the help

he can get and start chopping out pieces of paper the size of a dollar. I want two thousand of them right away. And I don't want the public to see it . . .

"This is Lieutenant Koertz of Tucson Police Department. Get your nearest man to the last phone booth on Concourse B at the airport right away. I know I can't order Sheriff's deputies anywhere but do it anyway. It's an emergency. If there's anyone talking on the phone, hold him. And get your fingerprint crew there right away . . . Mr. Caldwell, get over to the bank and put anything on a piece of paper and sign your name. They'll be waiting for you and they'll give you the Monopoly stuff. *Move!* . . . Get your guy there now. The sheriff will back me up. Call the chief deputy right after you dispatch the car . . . Caldwell! Get right back. We can't answer the phone for you."

Mr. Caldwell left for the bank while Lieutenant Koertz, now talking to the chief deputy of the sheriff's department, was coordinating the efforts of his men with those of the county deputies.

Patrolman Hector Mendoza, assigned to the traffic detail, was the officer closest to the bank when the call came in. He was fairly new to the force, but not too many years before he

had been a tough kid from South Tucson. He wasn't one to stand on ceremony. Six feet tall and 190 pounds, Officer Mendoza ordinarily presented an imposing appearance; in uniform, his impact was formidable. He wore his hat low, and the visor obscured his gentle blue eyes.

He strode into the office of the bank vice president, who was talking on the telephone. The vice president said, "Yes?" and Officer Mendoza motioned him to conclude his phone conversation. Then he said, "This is a police matter and it concerns your bank. Get every papercutter you have into this office and someone to operate each one. Also get a lot of paper—phone books! I'll explain as we go along."

By the time Mr. Caldwell got to the bank, two thousand dollar-size pieces of paper were stacked and waiting for him. He left, however, with \$30,000 in genuine U.S. currency. "If you can get back my Bernice safe and sound and catch these criminals too, Lieutenant, more power to you," he explained. "But if they somehow elude you and find this fake Monopoly money, they might kill her. And that's a chance I'm not going to take."

The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh phone calls from the

kidnapper came in, each giving Mr. Caldwell a small portion of the instructions he was to follow in order to free his wife. Each call was traced and each telephone instrument at the various public telephone booths was dusted, and fingerprints were lifted. The kidnapper, secure in not being apprehended at the phone, did not worry about leaving fingerprints. Following a few minutes behind him were members of the Sheriff's fingerprint crew. With enough samples, they got off a set to Washington by wire photo and received an identification within a short time. The kidnappers really didn't have a chance.

Mr. Caldwell put the money into a cheap overnight bag and, accompanied by Lieutenant Koertz, who sat slouched low in the front seat, dropped it at a destination named by the kidnapper in his last call.

Good police work had identified a kidnapper as one of the two men who rented a room near the interstate highway. Within twenty-four hours after the abduction, Mrs. Caldwell was free and the kidnappers were in custody.

The Caldwell kidnapping was solved, but another and in some ways more vexing problem faced law enforcement authorities in the Tucson area.

The \$30,000 in ransom money had disappeared.

Shortly after the kidnappers were arrested, two detectives assigned to the Tucson Felony Squad were sent to retrieve the bag Mr. Caldwell had put in the trash can in the teachers' parking lot at Mansfield Junior High School. The bag felt suspiciously light, so the officers dropped it back in and dragged the whole trash can back to police headquarters.

There, Lieutenant Koertz accused them of stupidity above and beyond the call of duty. He zipped open the bag, turned it upside down and shook it, then turned it inside out. After he upended the trash can, scattering its contents all over his office floor, he ordered six uniformed patrolmen to scour the school area and look for the \$30,000.

The disappearance of the money rocked the city. The city's two newspapers kept the story on page one for a week and made it the subject of several editorials. The morning paper, taking its usual approach, blasted police corruption. It rehashed every bribery and brutality story it had printed in the last thirty years and dwelt at length on a Missouri kidnapping that resulted in the murder of the victim, the execution of the criminals and

suspicion that the police stole the ransom money, which was never recovered.

Officers Orozco and Salmi were tried and convicted in the morning press, and the city council had no choice but to relieve them from duty pending a full background investigation. They were guilty until proven innocent.

The afternoon paper had another view of the matter. Obviously there were three men in on the kidnapping. One who kept Mrs. Caldwell under guard in the motel room. Another who drove around town making calls to the victim's husband. And a third, stationed somewhere within full view of the trash can, who emptied the bag within minutes after it had been dropped off.

The police had not been corrupt: they just hadn't done their job very well and a kidnapper had escaped with \$30,000 of a good citizen's money. Perhaps it was time to get a new chief of police. Both papers tried to enlist Mr. Caldwell's support for their points of view, but his only statement, although it undoubtedly endeared him to Mrs. Caldwell, didn't do anything for them—"If it had been thirty million, it still would have been worth it to have Bernice back. I don't care who has the money."

The kidnappers had a difficult line to walk. On the one hand, they insisted on their innocence. On the other, they tried to support the morning paper's charge by supplying details that only the kidnappers could know. Their anti-police instincts were at war with their instincts for self-survival. The public defender assigned to their case warned them that the missing money would weigh against them. The prosecutor put it to them bluntly. "Return the money and I won't press for more than ten years—keep it and I'll pile charge on charge so you won't get out in a thousand years with good behavior."

A contributor to the letters to the editor column had still a third explanation.

Editor the Star:

I have read with interest the accusations of police malfeasance with regard to the disappearance of the Caldwell ransom money. I have also read in your competitor newspaper the theory of a third accomplice in the crime. But is it not possible that blind, stupid chance played a role in the matter?

In a city of 350,000 there are always people somewhere at any time of the day. Why can't you suppose that someone—not connected with

the kidnapping and not connected with the Tucson Police Department—noticed a man drive up to a garbage can, drop a bag into it and drive away? Why can't you suppose that this person, out of curiosity or for some other reason, decided to look into the bag and found the money? What would you or anybody else do if he found \$30,000 in a garbage can? Remember, no one knew about the kidnapping then.

It is possible that right now someone is sitting in front of \$30,000 and debating what he should do. And elected representatives of the people are screaming about a nonexistent third accomplice or making life a hell on earth for two Tucson detectives.

Morris Schechtman

Hector Mendoza's wife read him Morris Schechtman's letter as he was finishing his second cup of coffee for the morning. "There you have it," she said cheerfully. "The cops took the money. The kidnappers took the money. Or someone out of the blue took the money. There is no other possibility."

Hector Mendoza said nothing.

Mrs. Mendoza continued. "Seriously, honey, you worked on the case. You got the fake money ready. You know a lot of

things that weren't in the papers. What do you think happened to the money?" Mrs. Mendoza's bright black eyes shone and her pretty round face glowed with animation and excitement.

Hector Mendoza said, "Nu, mein Schatz, I know only this. Of all the people on the police force, I'm one of the few who can't be suspected. I sat holding a bank vice president's hand until after they found the money gone. The lieutenant told me to sit still until he called me and the vice president, I guess, thought that included him, too."

"Well, I don't think for a minute any policeman took the money," she said. "A guy stumbling onto the money is hard to swallow. I think the kidnappers somehow got the money. There is no other possibility, as the man said."

"There's always another possibility," Hector Mendoza said. "Not in this case."

"In every case," he said. He kissed her and left for his duty station.

Hector Mendoza, like the other police officers who had been involved with the Caldwell case, had been removed from regular assignment. His new duty station was Central Headquarters, where he waited around in detectives'

hall with other officers in the same situation. They discussed the Caldwell case until they were sick of it and then lapsed into silence. Each felt that bringing up any other subject made him look less dedicated, so it was talk about the case or shut up. The chief of Tucson's police called them in one by one to question them. At four forty-five Hector Mendoza went home.

Mrs. Mendoza was reading a book when he came in. They kissed and Hector Mendoza said, "What are you reading?"

"*Treffpunkt Las Vegas*," she said. "By Erle Stanley Gardner."

"What's it called on this side of the Atlantic?"

"Las Vegas Rendezvous, I guess. Did you ever read it?"

"No, but I think I saw it on TV. What's for dinner?"

"I haven't decided. But I won't start it for another hour. What would you like?"

"I don't care. Have we got any beer?"

"You drank the last can last night."

"I'm going to go out and get some."

"Come right back. I got some ideas about how the kidnappers took the money, and I want to tell you while they're fresh in my mind."

Hector Mendoza walked the

two blocks to the Ace High Bar, grumbling. He loved his wife, but sometimes she really bugged him. She had a thing about detective stories. She read one or two mystery novels a month and subscribed to *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*. In Germany, where they met, it amused him.

She knew a good deal about U.S. cities from reading Rex Stout, Brett Halliday, Erle Stanley Gardner and others, and her gangster slang was quite good. She read the books in French, German or English—whichever language they were available in and, when she found one she really liked, she read it in all three languages. On many of their dates he took her to see detective movies, and on their honeymoon in London they saw Agatha Cristie's *Mousetrap* twice.

When his enlistment was up, they settled in Tucson, where he had spent most of his life. He had planned to return to his old job working for his father, who was a construction contractor, but she talked him into taking the civil service patrolman's test. He passed the test and got the job, and in her mind he was on the first step of a career ladder that led to the ultimate job. His next step would be police sergeant, after

that detective, then head of detectives, then chief of police. Finally could come *the job*—private detective!

Mendoza didn't mind discussing detective stories with her. He read many of them to please her although he preferred non-fiction about the Southwest. He didn't mind discussing police work with her, cluing her in on the workings of a metropolitan police force. But when she started talking about his work in terms of a detective story, then he minded it.

"Detective fiction," he once told her, "has as much to do with law enforcement as Zane Grey has to do with what really happened here in the Southwest!"

At the Ace High, a friend was having a draft beer. Mendoza joined him in a beer, then in a few games of eight-ball. When he returned with a six pack, dinner was almost ready. Mrs. Mendoza was angry. "*Er kommt gelaufen, geritten!*"

"Aw, Helma, knock it off. You I sometimes run into an old buddy at the Ace High. Besides, supper isn't ready yet."

Helma Mendoza said nothing.

"Well, I'm going to have a beer. Do you want one?"

Helma said nothing.

"What's on TV?"

Nothing.

"Okay, then. How did the



kidnappers take the money?" Hector Mendoza decided to open lines of communication.

"Well, the kidnapper who was to pick up the ransom had a package addressed to himself in care of General Delivery in some town where he planned to be. He took the money out of the bag, put it in the package and dropped it in a mailbox. There's one a block away from the school. I called the post office today." Helma's eyes were shining, and her face was flushed.

Mendoza decided to humor her. "How could he get it wrapped so fast? And get it weighed? And get the right

postage on it? You know we nailed them both at the motel a short time after Koertz and Mr. Caldwell dropped the money off. And he had to drive all the way to the motel."

"Let's take them one at a time, Hector," Helma said, beaming. "He had the package completely wrapped except for one end. As soon as he had the money, he put it in and sealed the end with a big piece of masking tape. How did he know how big the package would be? He did what you and the bank clerks did. He cut pieces of paper up, put them together and got a package to fit them.

"How did he know how much the package would weigh? Do you know that ink blotter we once got from the bank—the one that told you your height or weight in dollar bills? He looked on a chart like it and got the right weight. Then he found the correct postage—any almanac would tell you that. He bought the stamps a day, a week, a month before. He was ready.

"When he told Caldwell to get the money together he insisted on tens and twenties. He had it figured. The size and weight even determined the amount of the ransom. Otherwise, why didn't he ask for more? Ask yourself why the

amount was thirty thousand." Helma rested her case.

"I can't really argue with your details," Hector said hoping for a truce and also getting hungry. "As you've described it, a guy could mail thirty thousand in a minute or so. But look at the other side of it. We've got *them*. Whatever happened to the money doesn't change that. We've got fingerprints on the ransom note, on the telephones, on the Caldwell mailbox. We've got an eyewitness identification—Mrs. Caldwell. We've even got voiceprints."

"Voiceprints aren't admissible evidence," Helma said.

"I know that," Hector said. "But with everything else, they convince the Federal Attorney he's got the right men. He doesn't need the money to get a conviction. Knowing he's got the right men, he's going to push as hard as he can. Returning the money could only help the kidnappers get a lighter sentence. And they wouldn't have to incriminate themselves. Any one of the reporters would be glad to bring in the money for the headlines—and claim the right to protect his sources. No, Honey, the kidnappers didn't get the money."

"Then you're saying the police took the money—or some creepy peeping Tom!"

"I didn't say that," he replied.

"There's no other possibility."

"Not necessarily."

"That's what you said this morning."

"That's what I'm saying tonight."

"Then what are the other possibilities?"

"That's for you to come up with, sweetheart."

"Me? Why me?"

"Because, as a reader of detective stories, you know all the weird solutions to all the baffling problems. I'm just a patrolman, grade one. I don't believe the kidnappers got the money. The only cops who could have taken the money are the obvious suspects. I know them well enough to know they aren't that stupid. An unknown person coming on the money? Well, I just can't accept that."

"Why not?"

"I don't know—But somehow it doesn't fit."

"Is that all?"

"No, I've got two other things to say. Let's eat—and let's talk about something else!"

They ate. The meal was wiener schnitzel with spaghetti. On a breadboard were diagonal slices of french bread. In the center of the table was a bottle of cheap but good chianti. A vinegar and oil salad had preceded everything. Hector ate with gusto. He couldn't have

had a better meal at Maxim's and he told Helma so. She thanked him and she knew he was right.

The next day in detectives' hall Hector Mendoza was discussing the case with Detective Lindblade. Helma's question came to his mind and before he could check it, it came out of his lips. "Why was the amount 30,000?"

"Well," Lindblade said, "I guess the kidnappers must have thought that anybody who could afford a one hundred thousand dollar house must have at least thirty thousand in the bank."

"Did he have thirty thousand dollars in the bank?"

"Why ask me? You were the one at the bank."

"I didn't care what he had: If he had only ten cents, I still would have got the fake stuff ready."

"Well, there you are. It didn't make any difference."

"You're right," Hector said. Then Helma's question again came out of his mouth. But why thirty thousand?"

"What?"

"Why not twenty-five? Or forty? Or fifty?"

"You got some kind of theory, Mendoza?" the detective said.

"No, I was just curious."

"The chief said he wanted us to think about the case and tell

him any ideas we had, even if they're out in left field. If you think there's something funny about thirty thousand, tell him."

"I will," Hector Mendoza spoke thoughtfully.

And he did. "There was exactly thirty thousand, forty-three dollars and forty-one cents in the Caldwell account," the chief said. "The kidnappers planned to clean them out."

The chief lit a cigarette. "You're the first officer to ask any questions about the amount," he said. "Do you have some reason?"

"No, I was just curious."

"Good! Keep being curious. That's the only way we're going to solve this case."

"How," Hector Mendoza asked, "did the kidnappers know they had that amount?"

The question coincided with the ringing of the chief's phone. The chief talked for a long while to someone. While he talked Hector answered his own question. The kidnappers had asked for more but Caldwell told him he only had thirty thousand during the first or second phone call—before the police arrived.

When the chief was through on the phone he said, "You were saying something when the phone rang. What was it?"

"Oh, nothing, sir."

"It wasn't nothing. What was it?"

"Oh, just that it was a good thing he had the money."

"Why?"

"Well, he got back his wife—and we got the kidnappers."

"We didn't need the money to get them. The paper you got together at the bank was all we needed. By the way, that was good work—what you did at the bank. If the kidnappers had been watching the bank—we know they weren't—they still would not have known." The chief lit another cigarette.

"Thank you, sir."

"But did I answer your question about the ransom money? That phone call distracted me."

"Yes, sir."

"You're not holding anything back, are you?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Good! Keep thinking about the case. If there's anything else about it that seems funny to you—no matter how wild it is—let's talk about it. No conventional explanations seem to work."

"Right, sir." Hector Mendoza left the office of the Tucson Chief of Police.

He sat around detectives' hall till noon, then went to lunch. On his way out Detective Lindblade invited him to lunch at the Downtown Deli. Hector

said, "Thanks, but I'm supposed to meet a buddy."

Hector wasn't going to meet a buddy. He just wanted to get off by himself and think. He drove to South Tucson, to Mi Nidito's, and ordered a hamburger and a glass of Coors. He was almost finished when the vice-president of Downtown Bank walked up to his table with three associates and clapped a hand on his shoulder.

"How are you?" the vice-president said. "Men, I want you to meet Officer Mendoza. He's the one I told you about who helped me get that fake money together so we could catch those kidnappers."

Hector stood up and shook hands and forgot every name as soon as he heard it.

The vice-president and his associates sat down at Hector's table. They ordered the Mexican specialties the restaurant was renowned for. They talked about the kidnapping, especially about the vice-president's role in solving it. Hector listened politely, contributing occasionally to the conversation when it seemed necessary. He ordered his coffee, thinking he would have heard no more about the kidnapping if he had gone with Lindblade to the Deli and he would have saved on gas, too.

The vice-president was ex-

pounding on his role in the case when Hector, almost choking on his coffee, said, "What?"

The vice-president's face wore the same expression it had when Hector had barged into his office on the day of the kidnapping. His only response was, "What?"

"What did you just say about the Caldwell account?" Hector asked.

"Why, I was just telling the guys about what a chance I took when I gave Mr. Caldwell the money." The vice-president looked hurt as if Hector were in some way detracting from his glory.

"How were you taking a chance?"

"Well, if Mrs. Caldwell hadn't signed the withdrawal slip later, the bank—that is, I—would have been in trouble."

"Why?"

"Because the account was in her name only," the vice-president said. He looked at his associates for some kind of support. One nodded. The other grinned foolishly. The third took a piece from the huge tostado that sat in the middle of the table.

Hector stood up. "Gentlemen," he said, "It's been a pleasure." He shook the vice-president's hand. He shook the hand of each associate, asking and remembering each name.

In twenty minutes he was back in detectives' hall.

He read every report on the Caldwell case. He went to the headquarters law library and read everything he could find on police searches and warrants for search. At four forty-five he went home.

After supper, Helma and Hector went to the movies. They saw *Cabaret*. They had a snack at Helsing's and went home. Over a bottle of wine Helma expounded on how the film reflected pre-war Germany, according to what Helma's mother had told her, and how it didn't reflect pre-war Germany, according to what Helma's mother had told her.

Hector tried unsuccessfully to lead the conversation around to the Caldwell kidnapping, but Helma wasn't interested. The music was great and so was the cinematography. But did every nightclub in Germany before the war have to be something out of *The Blue Angel*? And couldn't the film have been more conclusive? Hector gave up on the Caldwell case. Later they went to bed.

The next day, Saturday, Hector got up before Helma and drove to a hardware store on Sixth Avenue. He bought a BB gun.

The clerk said, "Will that be all?"

"No," Hector said, "I'll need some BB's."

"How many?"

"Oh, five should do it." The clerk left and returned with five tubes of BB's. He put the tubes on the counter.

"What's this?" Hector said.

"Your BB's."

"I'm not trying to buy out the store. I just need five BB's."

"We only sell them by the tube," the clerk said. "But there's a hundred to the tube. And they're only ten cents a tube."

Hector took one tube and the BB gun and drove home. Next door, Norbert Hernandez was playing in front of his house.

"Hey, Norbert, ask your mother if you can go shoot some BB's with me."

Norbert ran to the back of his house and returned, saying, "She said okay."

Hector and Norbert drove to the northern foothills section of the city and then up an arroyo that separated two rows of houses.

Hector put a rusty can on the bank of the arroyo, cocked the gun and handed it to Norbert. "See if you can hit it," he said.

Norbert shot and missed. Hector cocked the gun and said, "Try again."

Norbert shot and missed. Hector cocked the gun and said, "Try again."

Norbert shot and missed and put a BB through the window of a garage.

"Oh-oh!" Hector said. "I think we may have broken a window." Hector went to the window and peered in, said, "We've broken it all right. I'd better see if we've done any other damage." Hector entered the garage through an unlocked door. In a few minutes he came out.

"Well, we've done enough shooting, Norbert," he said. "I think we had better make a phone call." Hector put a dime in the pay telephone in front of a Circle K store and talked for a long time.

Twenty-five minutes later, two patrol cars pulled up in front of the house with the garage with the BB hole in its window and another patrol car parked in back of it. An unmarked car, carrying the county attorney and the chief of police, also arrived. The chief of police rang the bell. When the door was opened he handed a man in pajamas a search warrant and nodded. A uniformed policeman went to the garage and returned with an overnight bag containing \$30,000. The man in the pajamas left in one of the police cars.

THINGS DIDN'T QUIET down at the Mendoza house until mid-

night. Hector and Norbert drove home from the northern foothills. Hector made Norbert a gift of the BB gun and went into his own house. The phone was ringing. It was the chief of police. Hector was to get down to police headquarters immediately. Helma got up.

"Who was it?" she asked.

"Oh, I got to go to Headquarters," he said.

"Why? You're not supposed to be on duty this Saturday."

"I know, but they think they've got the person who took the Caldwell ransom money."

"Who?"

"Mr. Caldwell."

"Why would he take his own money?"

"I can't tell you now. I got to get into uniform. Would you run a cloth over my service shoes? I didn't get a chance to shine them."

The phone ran again and Helma answered it. "It's Mrs. Hernandez. She wants to know if you gave a BB gun to Norbert."

"Tell her I did," Hector shouted from the bathroom.

"How could you when you don't have one?"

"Just tell her I did. I'll explain later."

Helma hung up and the phone rang again. "It's for you, Hector. I think it's the chief."

Hector talked briefly on the

phone, then started to get out of his uniform.

"What's the matter?" Helma asked.

"Nothing. He's just coming down here instead of me going there."

"Will you tell me what's going on, or do you want me to scream?"

"Well . . ."

The doorbell rang. It was Norbert Hernandez. He handed Helma the BB gun and said, "Here! My mom doesn't want me to have it. She said I'm too young for one."

Helma shut the door and said, "Hector, what is going on?"

The phone rang.

So it went on. The chief of police arrived in an official car. He talked with Hector for a while and then the county attorney arrived in another official car. Neighbors, curious about the visitors to the Mendoza home, called Hector's parents. The senior Hector Mendozas paid a visit. Then Mrs. Hernandez came over to explain why she didn't want Norbert to have a BB gun although no explanation was really necessary.

Officers Orozco and Salmi came with heartfelt thanks and a huge bottle of good champagne. Helma put the champagne in the refrigerator and

answered the phone. Reporters had got wind of the story, and Hector gave them the standard working-cop's referral to the department's information director. Hector's brother and sister-in-law came over with their kids.

Later, the Mayor paid a visit and talked in general terms about extraordinary merit promotions. Two council members of the opposition party came later and told Hector he was going to be promoted to sergeant Monday, that it was supposed to be a surprise and that since that windbag of a mayor spoiled it, he might as well know the opposition party made the motion. Detective Koertz paid a visit, along with Detective Lindblade and a lot of other well-wishers from the department.

Around midnight they shut off all the lights in the house except a small one in the kitchen, and Hector and Helma sat down at the table and popped open the bottle of champagne.

"I've heard every word that was said in this house today," Helma said. "But I still don't know why Mr. Caldwell took the money."

"Mein Kind, there are things in this world that are not dreamed of in your detective stories," Hector said in mock pompous tones.

Hector, I'll break this bottle over your head!"

"Okay, okay. Mrs. Caldwell had all the money in the family. Mr. Caldwell married a rich but suspicious widow. Under the community property laws of Arizona, a person keeps control over all the property he—in this case she—brings into a marriage. Mrs. Caldwell kept tight control over the pile she inherited from her first husband, and this bugged Caldwell."

"But what has this to do with the kidnapping? We know he had nothing to do with the kidnappers."

"Right. If there hadn't been a kidnapping, he might have spent the rest of his life crabbing—to himself—about his cheapskate wife. Or he might have left her. But out of the blue, his wife is kidnapped. If this happened in one of your detective stories, you would say the plot was improbable and not a very good story."

"Don't get snotty, Hector."

"Okay. Out of the blue, his wife gets kidnapped. And what does he do? He calls the police."

"But Hector, that's what you want people to do. Isn't it?"

"Of course we do. But Caldwell did it for the wrong reason—he *wanted* his wife to get killed. He called us so fast it's a wonder the kidnappers

didn't get a busy signal when they called him the second time. After we got in on the case, there wasn't much he could do except hope the kidnappers would find out."

"That lousy __!" Helma uttered a two syllable German word that is a word-for-word translation of a common English term of contempt.

"Right you are," Hector agreed. "If Mrs. Caldwell had been killed, he would have got everything. And as a kind of additional insurance he insisted on real money at the bank instead of fake stuff. If Mrs. Caldwell got free, he'd at least have the thirty thousand."

"That lousy __!"

"Helma, you're repeating yourself," Hector said.

"I don't care," she said. Indignation was radiating from her. "So he somehow got the money out of the bag?" Helma's curiosity overcame her indignation. "How?"

"He just *happened* to have two identical overnight bags." Hector's "happened" captured the precise tone of voice of someone summarizing—and making fun of—a cheap detective movie. Helma ignored his sarcasm and Hector continued. "He put the bag of money under his car seat. At the drop, he pulled out the empty bag he'd put there before."

"And what did he hope to get out of the *schmutzerei*?"

"Well, he would have thirty thousand to finance his escape from Mrs. Caldwell or to spend on the sly if he stayed with her. Or—what the hell do I know what a guy who'd married a woman for her money would do with thirty thousand?"

"You'd probably come up with some idea if it were you," she said. "But what made you suspect him in the first place?"

"You. When you said there were only three possibilities—a crooked cop, a third kidnapper or an insomniac Tucsonian—you made me kind of angry, Helma. You made the case sound like a whodunit. Like something contrived by a writer. I decided to look for another explanation because I don't think life's a whodunit. Mr. Caldwell was one of a lot of possibilities."

"And once you started with him, you kept after him until you got the evidence."

"Helma, cops don't keep after people."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I just kept an open mind. And things that didn't fit into other explanations made sense if you suspected Mr. Caldwell."

"Such as?"

"He called the police right after his wife was kidnapped. We want people to do that. But

most people don't. He insisted on real money instead of the stuff I had made up at the bank. If we had nabbed one kidnapper at the drop and the other one found out, it would have been as bad for Mrs. Caldwell as if the money were fake. He told the newspapers he didn't care who had the money as long as his wife was safe. Most people would be pretty mad about losing thirty thousand. He just didn't act like a guy on the level."

"But it was the bank vice-president who clinched it. When he told you the money in the bank was in Mrs. Caldwell's name."

"Well, yes and no."

"What do you mean 'Yes and no'?"

"I mean yes—I did what I did today because of what he told me. I mean no—I would have done it anyway, but not for a few days. Not till I was a little more sure of myself."

"Honey, you knew about it yesterday. That was when you met the bank vice-president at Mi Nidito's. Why didn't you tell me? Or were you under some kind of police oath of secrecy?"

"*Liebling*, I tried. But you were more interested in Liza Minelli. Remember?"

"Let's finish the champagne and go to bed."

They did.

An Innocent Man



by HERBERT HARRIS

Brent's sole mistake was falling in love with Marian Carnaby. It all but cost him his life.

SHOULD ALL KILLERS BE HANGED? Should only *some* be hanged? Ex-Superintendent Foster, of Scotland Yard, and I were arguing on this topic in the lounge of a West End club when Foster suddenly pressed my arm with his fingers, silencing me.

I followed the direction of his keen eyes, as he sat there, saying nothing. He was looking at a tall, grey-haired man of about fifty-five or so.

The latter had entered the lounge, glanced casually at the occupants as if looking for someone, and gone out again.

When the man disappeared from sight, the Yard man asked: "Did you notice who that was?"

I said: "Well, I know him by sight, but I forget his name."

"His name is Michael Brent. He's a solicitor," Foster reminded me.

He sat for a moment studying the bowl of his pipe thoughtfully, then went on: "We were talking about capital punishment. Well, sometimes I think it's a good thing, and other times I don't. Brent, you see, happens to be a case in point..."

"I rather fancied he had something to do with the law," I prompted.

"So you don't remember the case in which Brent figured?" Foster asked.

"As counsel?" I said.

The Yard man shook his head. "No—as defendant. And I don't mind admitting that we came as near as dammit to sending that chap for 'the drop'. But luckily nobody was certain that it was murder 'beyond all reasonable doubt', so the verdict was manslaughter."

Foster sucked at his pipe. "Brent was given five or seven years, I forget which. This was before the last war. I daresay you would be at school at the time..."

I nodded.

"A fellow named George Carnaby was found shot in his house out Hendon way. In many ways Carnaby was a bit of a 'nut case'. He had started life in the gutter, but had made a mint of money out of scrap metal deals. Everyone just hated the bloke on sight—and he knew it."

"He was a crude man with a cunning brain. He thought he could ride rough-shod over everybody just because he had made a lot of money. When he couldn't get his own way, he would fly into blind rages. His poor little wife, Marian, had often threatened to walk out on him—and she did in fact seek advice on the possibility of getting a divorce."

"I suppose the solicitor she went to was Michael Brent?" I suggested.

Foster nodded. "Yes, and it was a bad day really when she went to him. You see, Brent was recovering from an unsuccessful love affair. He was just about ripe for the well-known 'rebound'."

"Marian Carnaby was an attractive redhead, and a great deal younger than her husband. George Carnaby was about forty-five, and his wife was around thirty, which made her roughly the same age as Michael Brent."

"She was warm and emo-

tional and very feminine—the sort of woman who wants a sympathetic man she can cling to. It was only natural, I suppose, that Brent saw himself as that man. Whatever you might think about a solicitor who embarks on an illicit affair with a married woman client, the fact remains that he and Marian fell head over heels in love.

"And though this love affair was supposed to be a closely guarded secret, there were plenty of people who seemed to know all about it when George Carnaby was found dead. He had been shot through the heart at close range, and was found lying before the fireplace in the lounge of his house at Hendon.

"We ruled out suicide right away, because there was no gun anywhere near the body. Whoever had killed him had taken the gun away.

"On the other hand, the fact that he had been shot from a distance of no more than twelve to eighteen inches, while face to face with his killer, suggested that there might have been a violent struggle for possession of the gun and that it had gone off accidentally.

"We pounced at once on two very important clues. One was a note which Carnaby had scribbled on a notepad on his desk. Dated the day of the kill-

ing, it said: 'Expect M.B. at 4 p.m.'

"The time of Carnaby's death had been fixed at about four in the afternoon. Very significant, you see.

"The other clue was a grey button from the cuff of a lounge suit, which we found on the floor under Carnaby's body.

"Our next moves were clear, then. First we had to find who 'M.B.' might be. Secondly, had 'M.B.' a motive for killing Carnaby? Thirdly, had 'M.B.' a jacket with a button missing from the cuff?

"Well, we learned about Michael Brent in no time at all. We established also that he had lost a button from the sleeve of his jacket, and that it matched the others on the jacket exactly.

"And the motive? All too obvious. We didn't have to work very hard to loosen the tongue of the emotional Marian Carnaby.

"Her life as George Carnaby's wife had been a hideous nightmare. The man had been crazy to the point of being certifiable—there was ample evidence of that. She was deeply in love with Michael Brent and had wanted to go and live with him.

"Carnaby had told her he was determined not to free her. He had even threatened to have Brent struck off the solicitors'

roll for scandalous misconduct.

"Bit by bit we pieced the picture together, and it made us feel more sorry for Brent than for the late Mr. Carnaby. We would have been delighted if Brent could have trotted out a sound alibi. But he couldn't. He hadn't appeared at his office. He hadn't been seen by Marian.

"Marian, of course, also had a motive for killing Carnaby, but her alibi was cast-iron—definite proof that she had been visiting friends out of town.

"Where had Brent been on the afternoon of Carnaby's death?

"Brent's answer was: 'I went to keep an appointment with a man named Jackson, who wanted to consult me about a property deal. He phoned me on somebody's recommendation, asking me to meet him outside Golders Green station at 4 o'clock, and said he would be waiting for me in a red Jaguar. I waited, but he didn't turn up, so I went home to my flat about five.'

"Our boys went to work on that one, but after all kinds of enquiries and appeals, it was obvious that nobody named Jackson with a red Jaguar existed. It looked as if Brent had cooked up a phoney alibi for the period when he had actually gone to see Carnaby—perhaps to have a showdown about Ma-

rian. Despite the note on Carnaby's desk-pad, he denied making any appointment to see him at 4 o'clock.

"When Brent finally stood trial, several factors weighed heavily in his favour. His gentle manner, his many kindnesses towards Marian, were in striking contrast to the character of the dead man, who was a ruthless, violent man, insanely possessive where his wife was concerned.

"The very close range of the shooting, and the loss of the sleeve button, indicated that there might have been a struggle. Lastly, there was no evidence that Brent had ever owned a gun or acquired one. No gun had been traced, either, although, of course, this was not unusual.

"The jury argued for more than an hour, and at length they decided on a verdict of manslaughter."

Ex-Superintendent Foster was frowning, and I said: "Did he actually serve the full sentence?"

Foster shook his head. "No. Fortunately he only served a very small part of it. You see, as it later turned out—and it was only by the merest stroke of luck that it did—George Carnaby *had* actually committed suicide."

I stared blankly at Foster.

"But there was no gun!" I exclaimed.

"No, there was no gun," Foster said. "Carnaby was a crazy man—I told you that. He wanted revenge. When he killed himself, he wanted to be sure Brent would be charged with his murder.

"He had found the button from Brent's cuff after Brent had been to the house. This he had put under his body deliberately before shooting himself.

"He had also put the accusing finger on Brent by scribbling that fake note on his desk-pad about the 4 p.m. appointment.

"Then he had impersonated a fictitious man named Jackson on the phone, and sent Brent on a wild-goose chase, in order to create what would look, later on, like a phoney alibi."

Foster drew on his pipe and went on: "But the most diabolically cunning part was the

gun...only it didn't quite work out as he had planned."

The Yard man was enjoying the puzzled look on my face.

"Carnaby didn't count on the fact that the people who took over the Hendon house from the widowed Marian would start off by having the chimney swept.

"Some way up the chimney of the fireplace before which Carnaby's body was found, a wooden bar had been firmly wedged. Dangling from this wooden bar was a gun—the gun which had killed Carnaby—on a length of strong elastic.

"George Carnaby had so held the gun when he shot himself that it was drawn up the chimney he let it go."

Foster slowly relit his pipe.

"You see," he said, "you can never be too cocksure about the guilt of those you send to the gallows."

MIKE SHAYNE PRESENTS

Next Month's Headliners

THE VERDICT WAS MURDER by BRETT HALLIDAY

A New Mike Shayne Novelet

THE BEST OF FAMILIES by GEORGE C. CHESBRO

THE DARK SIDE by BILL PRONZINI

A Story of Murder and Madness

NIGHT DROP

by JERRY JACOBSON

It was the eleventh hour and DuVol's time was running out. He needed \$800 more to get out of town alive, and here was an easy way to pick it off. A piece of cake—or was it?

THE YOUNG MAN SEATED at the counter in the Mecca Cafeteria, with the grocery bag trapped between his legs, was watching through the back mirror the man in the expensive suit seated at the corner table, eating a hot lunch. Joe Ori was nursing a cup of coffee. He was wearing a faded tee-shirt with an iron-on decal which entreated people not to buy grapes. Over it he wore a bleached military field jacket.

He continued studying the contrasts between himself and the well-dressed man eating his hot meal. Ori had not eaten a hot meal in at least six weeks. These days, all he did, it seemed, was go to meetings and steal fruit in the Public Market and wait for his sign.

The meetings—they never told you in them how exactly the system was to be defeated. They just exhorted you to defeat it, threw some pamphlets at you and kicked you out the door. He found himself hating the dapper man in the expensive suit. Why didn't they stay uptown where they belonged? This was a people's cafeteria. They'd do better to mind their own stores; the people would be storming them soon enough.

* * *

Quentin Du Vol let the third game draw to a tie, playing old man Parkington like a fish. Not so old, perhaps—around fifty. But decidedly a fish.

Parkington had the serve for



a match win. DuVol wiped away the excess moisture on his handball gloves against his thighs and tensed. The fish's serve was a weak lofty thing. The ball floated into the deep left corner where DuVol caught

the carom with a deft scoop shot.

Parkington swatted it off the front wall back to mid-court ineffectually. DuVol volleyed it back to nearly the same spot on the floor. They exchanged four

or five timid shots. DuVol could see the fish's legs weakening, see his knees floating on water. Two more shots by each man, and then DuVol lofted a deep lob over Parkington's right shoulder.

The fish went after it in panting desperation, his gym shoes slapping without coordination on the maple floor. The shot crimped itself where the two walls met, near the floor, and died long before Parkington could reach the spot. He tumbled and rolled into a heap against the wall. Another fish in the net.

DuVol gave him time to compose himself, to catch his breath. The fish had put up a game fight. But men like Parkington never beat a hustler when a hustler was playing his game.

"That's three out of three, DuVol," Parkington said when he felt his victim was a bit better. "At . . . what did we agree? Twenty a game?"

"I believe it was thirty," DuVol said.

The fish's cheeks flushed. "Oh, yes. I was thinking of the billiards. *That* was twenty a game. Well, what is it they say? Don't touch the dice if you can't pay the price?" His laughter was lame, false—like lead coins falling onto pavement. "that appears to be ninety dol-

lars for the handball and one hundred dollars for the billiards. Come on down to the locker room with me and we'll settle this up, you robber-baron."

They rode down together in the leather-walled elevator of the Downtown Athletic Club. "Well, I guess you know, DuVol," Parkington said on the way, "this has been a week for me to end all weeks. First that burglary and now this afternoon of shut-outs to you."

"Yes, I heard something of that going around. A daylight burglary, wasn't it?"

"The broadest and boldest," said Parkington with disgust. "Some amateur riding his luck. Paintings, everything in the safe in my study, jewelry belonging to my wife. It was all insured, of course. It's just that the sheer gall of a stunt like that has me enraged. I hope I get my hands on the bastard before the city police do, that's all I have to say on the subject."

"They'll get him. These people always make a slip-up sooner or later."

Parkington nodded and asked DuVol if he wanted to join him for lunch in the club's dining room. DuVol declined apologetically. He had an early afternoon appointment to see about some land he might take

an option on out at Eagle's Point.

There wasn't really any land out there to be had, even if Duvol could afford it, which he could not at the present. After a shower and a sauna and collecting from Parkington, he walked six blocks to the Mecca Cafeteria on Third Avenue and took to a corner table a hot roast beef sandwich, a small paper cup filled with potato salad and a glass of milk.

It had been DuVol who had engineered the burglary of Parkington's home in exclusive Bellehaven. He never participated in these things himself. He was an engineer, not a common laborer. He knew people for that sort of work.

It hadn't been much of a stroke, gaining membership in the Downtown Athletic Club. He held dozens of memberships in businessmen's clubs, all the way from Boston to Los Angeles with plenty of stops in between. DuVol was a gentleman games player, a gentleman gambler. Bridge, chess, backgammon, billiards in all its wondrous forms, handball, squash, poker on occasion.

Mastery at these always gained a man entry into this wealthy, polite world sooner or later, if he were very good at it. He was always "in" investments. A man who indicated



his profession was "investments" could nip all this business of background checking in the bud. He dealt in grain futures, bonds, speculative local stock issues, land development.

A business maverick was nearly always respected and feared. It was his unorthodoxy, perhaps, his sixth sense about matters of commerce. Whatever it was, he could doyetail into this world as easily and well as if he were born to its manner and its mystique.

In the Mecca he looked suspiciously out-of-place dressed in his \$300 suit (on which he still owed \$210) and the black attaché case (on which \$12 was still outstanding). But cutting expenses was a vital necessity now. Not much cash had come

out of the Parkington burglary and the men with whom DuVol contracted the job were having difficulty selling the paintings and the jewelry.

Paintings! He had told them a hundred times never to take original oils, under no circumstances those by local artists. But DuVol, out of necessity and haste, often had to deal with men who did not listen and could not learn and would not deny their greed.

He sighed at these human vagaries, finished off the remainder of his milk and left the Mecca. One of Stortino's men was still watching him, he noticed; a bulky, brutal-looking man who pretended to peruse the out-of-town newspapers at a sidewalk stall just outside.

The man had been with Quentin DuVol for over three weeks now. He hadn't approached DuVol, hadn't spoken to him, had made no contact with him whatsoever. He was just a messenger—Stortino would push the button when introductions were in order.

DuVol passed the man, pretending ignorance of his presence, and hailed a taxi. The man followed in a second cab out to DuVol's apartment building on a street lined with palms.

There were girls swimming in the azure, oval pool but

DuVol scarcely took note of their lithe, bronzed bodies as he made his way up a stairwell to the second floor, where his unit was located.

HE HAD ALREADY SHED his suit coat when the knock came. He let the burly man in. Stortini had pressed the button.

"Name's Kurt. Just . . . Kurt. Don't hold it against me *personally*, Mr. DuVol. I work for wages for Mr. Stortini. I have to buy groceries, spend a buck-twenty to do my laundry. If I don't do work like this, I don't do any kind of work except crime."

"I don't hold it against you, Kurt," said DuVol civilly as he moved to a portable bar he had bought when winners came too fast and furiously to count. "Drink?"

"Sure. Mr. Stortini don't mind booze on the job. He don't mind much at all as long as the work gets done."

Quentin DuVol felt the perspiration begin to seep onto his neck and chest. He abhorred people who sweated, unless it came in fencing or at handball or squash. He liked poker players who sweated. Sweating poker players always played into your own hand. In fact he loved them dearly.

"Preference?" He said to Kurt.

"Anything. You got any Southern Comfort? Something smoothie?"

DuVol made himself a short scotch. It was good scotch and there wasn't much left. It was usually dispensed only in the company of his intended marks. On second thought, he filled his own glass to three-quarters full. It wouldn't do for Stortini's man to think he had hit lean days.

"This is very nice, Mr. DuVol," said Stortini's man savoring his drink and taking in the furnishings of the living-room. "Nice drink, nice surroundings. Nice. What's that tall thing over in the corner called?"

"A French armoire, carved in the Pyrenees in the 16th century."

"The Pyrenees."

"It's a range of mountains running between Spain and France," said DuVol.

"And this chair I'm sitting in."

"English Regency."

"And that table off in the dining room there."

DuVol sighed to himself. "Spanish. Jacobean period."

"Very sturdy-looking."

"That was the style of the period. Heavy oak veneers and solids."

"Yes, very classy stuff, Mr. DuVol. Where I grew up, in

South Philly, we didn't have nothing like this in our home. We had Goodwill separates. Early American Miscellaneous. If my old man couldn't steal it, he got it through the welfare office."

DuVol touched his necktie and smiled civilly.

Stortini's man set his drink down on the coffee table. "Mr. Stortini assigned me to you. I guess you know that. About three weeks ago."

"As a direct result of the loan I secured from him five months ago."

"Six."

"Six months ago."

Stortini's man stifled a cough and withdrew a small black notebook from an inside pocket. "You been paying the interest on the principal right along, what it says here. Clockwork."

DuVol shifted in his seat.

"Up to about a month ago. Then you hit quite a streak of bad luck. At the race track, playing poker at that athletic club, in a couple of flyers you took on—what was it—oh yeh, soy bean futures they was going to sell to the Russians."

"Gambling is a cyclical business," DuVol said.

Stortini's man was fishing for some reference for the word.

"It runs in cycles," said DuVol, helping him out. "The swings "are entirely mathemat-

ical. The swings in fortune and misfortune."

"Well, I wouldn't know about that, Mr. DuVol. All I know is *Mr. Stortini* is very mathematical. He keeps very impeccable records on these matters. When you deal in the lending of capital, you *have to be* impeccable."

"Of course," said DuVol.

"And mathematical figures have their own way of telling a story, Mr. DuVol. I mean, they can be read like a book almost." Very carefully the man set down his glass. DuVol felt something shift in his chest, felt a squirming in his stomach. "Mr. DuVol, what I'm here to tell you is Mr. Stortini is calling in your notes. With penalties and interests, the amount is nine thousand five hundred eighty-three. Mr. Stortini would like full restitution by ten p.m. this evening."

DuVol tried to fashion on his face a look of calm disdain. "That will be impossible. You'll just have to tell Mr. Stortini that is totally beyond the realm of possibility."

"Mr. DuVol, this is an arbitrary decision. I'm sorry." The man flipped backward in his notebook to some fresh data. "There is this other matter due to come up soon," he went on. "This business at Hollywood Park about two weeks ago. Mr. Stortini, if you will recall, went

out on quite a long and slender limb for you in that matter. You had the drug, Mr. Stortini had the trainer."

"The double."

"The daily-double, yes."

"And you will recall," said DuVol, "I made Mr. Stortini over nine hundred in those two races. Without an inquiry."

"You explained to Mr. Stortini that the drug was not traceable."

"Reserpine, yes," said DuVol. "I had it on good authority."

"Apparently not good enough. The usual routine tests given all horses seemed negative. But some sharp-eyed chemist, an assistant to the commission veterinarian, thinks otherwise. It seems he's isolated the drug reserpine and one of its tranquilizer-agents, pentazocine, found to have been present in the systems of the two favored horses on those races. Tomorrow, he is going to introduce reserpine into the systems of two test horses and compare the results of blood and urine samples."

"Our trainer has been moved out of state successfully, but that won't prevent the racing commission from developing a network of suspects. So Mr. Stortini's hands are essentially tied. He wants his money by ten p.m. this evening and he wants you out of the state by

morning—and permanently."

"And if I can't comply with those two stipulations?" asked DuVol.

Stortini's man lowered his eyes. "I don't really have to answer that do I, Mr. DuVol? Before these "repercussions at the race track, you were only a delinquent account. You've now graduated to the category of a criminal liability. I think you know the answer to your own question, Mr. DuVol."

"I can leave the state immediately," said DuVol, "but the nine thousand—he has to give me some time on that."

"Mr. DuVol. It's the continued contact with you Mr. Stortini is trying to eliminate. Letters, phone calls, meetings for payments—these create unwanted risk. Call in your debts, Mr. DuVol. These furnishings. Good-looking stuff. Sell it. All of it. Mr. Stortini doesn't care how you do it, as long as it gets done. Don't get up, Mr. DuVol. I'll let myself out."

DUVOL SAT QUIETLY alone for several minutes. He began to feel much smaller than the volume of space his body occupied. It was now 1:15 p.m. He had a little over eight hours to save his life.

He picked up the telephone and dialed a Glendale number, let it ring twice and then broke



the connection. His own telephone rang almost immediately.

"Was that you?" said the caller.

"It was," said DuVol, grateful that Sonny Gorst could at least remember his instructions concerning names mentioned over a telephone. "I'm calling in regards to the art work you have on consignment. I'm not pleased with any of the work submitted and I'd like it destroyed."

Sonny Gorst spent a moment considering the implications of the remark DuVol had just made. Then he said, "All of it, sir?"

"All of it," said DuVol. "I

have some new works. I feel my outlook deepening. Can you drop by for a look at some canvases? Say around four o'clock this afternoon?"

"Y-yes, I can do that," said Sonny Gorst. "At your studio? Is it in the same place?"

"The same place," said DuVol and hung up.

At two o'clock a representative of Jaid Galleries came to Quentin DuVol's apartment. He wore a pinched black suit and ugly, wide-oval, Elton John spectacles.

"You wish to sell some pieces, Mr. DuVol?"

"Yes. Everything. I have discovered some opportunities out of state. I can't afford the time a move would take."

"I understand, Mr. DuVol."

THE MAN FROM Jaid Galleries began wandering the rooms of DuVol's apartment, an appraiser's guide open on his chest and a dainty, gold ball-point pen at the ready. He disappeared and then reappeared, like a fast-shifting fog uncertain of its existence.

He spent fifteen minutes at it and then returned to a seated position on a couch of no particular distinction.

"You have many fine pieces, Mr. DuVol," he began, sifting back over his notes. "You must understand, however, that the

Jaid Galleries deals essentially in estate collections."

"Of course," said DuVol, sensing some distance being created between them. "You have separates. Elegant separates, to be sure. But separates. We prefer groupings, thematic groupings."

"I will accept any reasonable price," DuVol hedged. "I must sacrifice at a loss."

The small, reserved eyes widened at that remark. The man plunged back into his notes again. When he came up again, his face was lit with a promising smile. "I find several of your pieces to be exquisite, Mr. DuVol. The armoire, for instance, is of a fine French period. And the Spanish trestle table and sideboard and chairs. Fine crushed gold upholstery, very fine. And the English Regency chairs here and the cherry Chippendale tea table, with the Ethan Allen chairs. Georgian Court collection. Very, very fine pieces."

DuVol held his breath.

"Yes—the gold crushed velvet on the Spanish dining table chairs," the little man hummed. "Very difficult to come by. For the pieces I have mentioned, Mr. DuVol, I can offer two thousand—if that figure meets with your approval."

If it met with his approval! The man was talking less like a respected appraiser and more

like a common fence. But DuVol could not presently argue the worth of his life; it simply had to be bought back at any price.

"Yes," DuVol said, hiding his embarrassment and indignation, "that figure is acceptable to me."

The man hastily made out a check. He rose abruptly and snapped his appraiser's guide closed with a loud slap to indicate symbolically a sale finalized. "May our men pick up this afternoon, sir?"

"Before six p.m., yes. I have evening appointments."

"Very good, Mr. DuVol. And don't worry. We'll find just the environment for your pieces, rest assured."

At four o'clock Sonny Gorst showed up while two burly movers were busy muscling the pieces of furniture DuVol had sold. DuVol took him into the bedroom and closed the door behind them.

"What's all this with the moving?" he said to DuVol, his little otter's face quivering with the scent of trouble.

"A development has—developed," DuVol told him. "Have you sold the jewelry from the Parkington heist?"

"I'm dickering with three fences, Mr. DuVol. I mean, we got some good stuff in that haul. Two diamond pendants,



the platinum ensemble of the wife, the bars of silver we found in the safe. The pendants, they're the key. I could get maybe two thousand apiece for them if I find the right fence with an immediate market."

"I want the lot sold to Driscoll, down on Mission Street. This afternoon."

"*Driscoll?* He'd take any reasonable offer for his own *mother!* He has backlog, he says. He says."

"Sell it all," said DuVol, sharply. "Accept the first offer Driscoll makes. Then cash this check. I want you back here within the hour."

"Sure, Mr. DuVol." Sonny Gorst looked at DuVol with the eyes of a spaniel whose mother had just been struck down by a passing car, a tragedy witnessed by the son. "Does this mean we're terminating the operation, Mr. DuVol? I mean, I'd hate to see that. You and me and Hunk been working out good, you steering us to the marks and me and Hunk cleaning them out."

"Let us just say we are taking a vacation. Keep your same residences. I'll be contacting both of you soon."

The movers left at four-fifteen and Sonny Gorst returned at five.

"The best deal I could get for the Parkington stuff was \$3,000

cash. The good thing about Driscoll, he's a cutthroat but he don't ask questions and he don't keep records."

"You owe me \$300 for the car," DuVol told Sonny Gorst. "I'll take two thousand. You can split the other thousand up with Hunk and we'll call it square. That is the way it cuts."

Ex-convicts on parole lived on nickels and dimes and borrowed time. Like Driscoll the available fence, they too did not ask questions. Mildly terrified by what he didnot know and what might put him back in prison, Sonny Gorst left then, with a quick handshake and without a backward glance.

Alone in a nearly denuded apartment Quentin DuVol counted the tribute that would keep him alive. He still had the \$190 he'd won from old man Parkington at the athletic club. Two thousand for the furniture, two thousand for the jewelry. That toted \$4,190. He was nearly halfway out of his grave.

He took his \$975 sedan to a used car dealer whose lot was not strung with bunting and balloons; to a lot, in fact, that was located directly across the street from the new-car agency where his sedan was originally purchased.

"I'll need your payment booklet and title to establish your

equity, Mr. DuVol," said the polite young man in a coco-brown suit and dark brown tie, without peacocks or wild flowers.

The young man had to cross the street to establish equity. DuVol waited alone in a lonely lot, degradation feeding on his dignity like sharp-toothed piranha. When the young men returned, it was with a check for \$500. DuVol signed over the sedan's title, shook his hand without grip or sensation and left the lot without speaking a word. He suddenly felt like a man who was being stripped and stoned by every human with whom he came in contact.

He took the check to an industrial bank nearby. A sweet-faced female teller turned it into cash in the swift, flawless, automatic way of someone who took no risks and did not dream. Risks and dreams; a man or a woman without them was more dead than alive, an empty receptacle waiting for a time and a place to lie down in an endless sleep. Some people never saw or found the light in the depths of their darkness.

DuVol saw light in his own darkness when he examined the fresh figure of his worth in dollars and cents: \$4,690. He'd crossed that invisible mid-point barrier. He'd make the \$9,000. Somehow, and in a variety of ways, he'd make it.

HE DIVESTED HIMSELF of his gold wristwatch, a ruby ring, a matched set of good golf clubs, his stereo setup including tapes and records. Beau Jack LaBeau usually gave DuVol the best price on merchandise that could not be traced.

"I can give you a thousand for the lot, Quentin," Beau Jack was saying apologetically to DuVol an hour later in his nice appointed shop in Pasadena.

"The stuff is not hot, Beau Jack," said DuVol, containing his indignance. "It's mine. It belongs to me."

"I'm not *buying* it, Quentin. I'm loaning you capital on it. You don't read neon signs when you walk into shops? You want to sell the stuff, Quentin, take out an ad in the *Herald-Examiner*."

"I need two thousand for it, Beau Jack."

"I give you twelve hundred fifty and go have my head examined in the morning."

"I'm in trouble, Beau Jack. Some big trouble and maybe it is the kind of trouble I won't be able to handle. I need the full two thousand. Call the rest of it a loan. You know I'm good for it. You'll get it back. And I don't think you've ever known me to break a promise."

"Only animal on the face of this earth guaranteed not to tell a lie is maybe a lie detec-

tor. But I give you the two thousand. I'm an old man. Okay, so maybe I see the son in you I never had, maybe the fool I'm buying off with tribute. Here. Don't count it. I don't lie. Me and lie detectors. Only two of us left in this thieving world with any ethics. Now go away, Quentin."

DUVOL WENT AWAY. He went in search of a minor miracle and he'd found it in Beau Jack LaBeau. He was just \$2,300 short of buying back his life. He looked around for Stortini's man as he came from Beau Jack's pawn shop, the man who called himself Kurt. He couldn't spot him anywhere, but DuVol knew his every move was being watched.

He went directly back to his apartment building, and dropped in on Mr. Damoran, the building's business agent and manager. "I've just been notified of an important business opportunity in Europe," DuVol told Damoran, "and it requires my presence there immediately."

Damoran nodded knowingly. "Yes, I thought something of an important nature was developing when I saw the movers take out a few of your pieces this afternoon."

"I wonder," said DuVol, "are you authorized to buy furnish-

ings and the like on behalf of the owners? Television sets, bedroom groupings, liquors, condiments, canned goods and the like?"

"Yes, we do that every so often. What price did you have in mind for the remainder of your furnishings and the like, Mr. DuVol?"

"Anything reasonable will be agreeable to me."

"Well, let's go upstairs and have a look."

DuVol didn't quibble over the \$1,500 check Damoran made out for the rest of his things and his damage deposit. Dignified acceptances were a rule-of-thumb with DuVol. He would argue over the quality of filet de boeuf, sauce Bearnais but never over its price.

The clock had reached six p.m. by the time DuVol was standing in a barren apartment. That men like Stortini were capable of doing a thing like this to another human being still heated DuVol with the fire of revenge. But he was presently a running man and running men could not put up much of an offense. For the moment he would pay his debt, meekly sequester himself in another state until this embarrassing matter of the drugged race horses had run its course. Then he would see about the arrangement of Stortini's death.

He was just \$800 short of this chain of events. DuVol sat down on the floor and snapped open a steel telephone register. He found the number he sought and dialed.

"Downtown Olympic Hotel."

"Mr. Carlisle's suite, please."

A moment lapsed.

"Hello?"

"Jonathan? Quentin DuVol. I find a need tonight for some prestidigital recreation in the company of honorable gentlemen."

The Downtown Olympic was the city's newest high-rise midtown hotel. DuVol occasionally employed Jonathan Carlisle, the hotel's maître d', to locate high-stakes poker games for a percentage of his winnings.

"Call you back in a half-hour," he told DuVol and hung up.

He called DuVol back at six-thirty on the dot.

"Tomorrow night, eight p.m., Suite thirteen thirty-three. Three furriers from Kansas City. I told them you're in beef cattle. What's good for the hide is good for the hindquarters."

"Tonight," DuVol told him. "The game has to be played tonight."

"Nothing tonight, Mr. DuVol. I checked the whole building."

DuVol could feel the perspiration building in his pores, a cold sweat of fear. He couldn't

risk a stop at the athletic club; he couldn't wait for a poker game to develop, foster the beginnings of one, cajole three or four businessmen into one. That was dead-time to him. If he failed, he would be caught \$800 short, without even having had a good run at making that amount.

"Jonathan, I need \$800," he said into the phone.

Carlisle's tone was as hapless as rain in a dead man's face. "You need eight hundred and I need Ann-Margret. How are we going to get together on that?"

"There are people after me, Carlisle."

"And you don't think there aren't people after me? I pay alimony and support to Carla, you know that. I see so little of my check after she gets her cut, it could just as well shoot itself right from the hotel's business office to her. Sorry, Quentin. I can't help you out."

The phone went dead in his ear and in his hand. Numbly DuVol put it up. He expected this end, in a way. The network of his life, it had been woven of threads too short and too few. His distrust of street people precluded the making of friends—and the distance he kept from his marks lent him no friends among these either.

He neither borrowed money nor lent it, his current beggings

aside. He had chalked up no credit beyond the credits from loan sharks and ephemeral backers. He now stood alone, painted into a tight corner by his own hand.

THE TIME WAS GETTING later—minutes short of seven o'clock. He went to his window and saw the city beginning to light and sign with the sounds of night. He had no sons, no daughters, no living relatives who might come to his aid with the haste required. A man so dependent upon himself could turn to no one for help, to no one for blame. That had been the cardinal mistake of his life. Not crime, not deceit, only that.

Below his patio he could see the sedan that was unfamiliar to his neighborhood. Through the windshield, beneath the car's steering wheel he could see a pair of male legs, an occasional hand and arm as the man behind the wheel reached forward to flick ashes into an ashtray on the dashboard.

Time seemed to have ground to a halt, a thing suspended and completely without properties of motion. Stortini was waiting, Kurt was waiting—and now, with no clear options left open to him, DuVol was waiting.

How long his eyes had swept up and down that block he did

not know. The apartment houses, the Paramount Cleaners, Shoenfeld Realty, more apartment houses, the waste of the alley, the Pasadena Trust Bank on the corner. Then, back up the block again, in reverse: the bank, the alley, the apartments, the real estate office, the cleaners, more apartments. To DuVol it was like watching a dull motion picture over and over again to keep out of the rain.

But something here was trying desperately to impress itself upon his mind. Each time his eyes swept the opposite side of Colorado Boulevard, an aspect tugged at his brain, a key dangled before the locked door to his quandry. Ah, *the bank!* Something to do with the bank. *On Thursday.*

DuVol strained his mind to its conniving limits. What happened there nearly every Thursday evening without fail? At eight p.m. No, a bit later, nearer to eight-fifteen. *What? Yes! The night deposit chute!*

Every Thursday evening—sometimes a man, sometimes a woman—would appear from around the corner on Los Robles Street, stroll unhurriedly down the length of the block to the bank, take a bank-deposit bag from a plain brown grocery bag, drop it into the night deposit chute and then return to

the store or firm from which he or she had come.

There was his messenger out of Mr. Stortini's debt and off his list of people to be dispatched quickly and quietly into non-status. There must be *at least* the \$800 he needed in that deposit bag. Not even a pistol would be needed, just two fingers thrust into the small of a back or the back of a head. Business people were always instructed never to resist robbery. Yes, it would do nicely.

The key was timing of course. If the figure of the messenger should unexpectedly appear around the corner from Los Robles Street with DuVol still housed in his apartment, he could never reach the street in time to prevent those receipts from slipping down the mouth of the deposit chute. Likewise he knew he could not be found loitering near the bank. One look at him there as the messenger came around the corner spelled instantaneous defeat.

If he kept up a surveillance from the entryway of his apartment building, could he move across the street to intercept the messenger before his attention was attracted? No way. The bank *did* have a recessed doorway adjacent to the deposit chute. But it would take only a single passing patrol car to uncover his intentions. The

doorway it would have to be. DuVol looked at his watch. The time had moved to 7:18. He had to allow for an early or late arrival by the messenger. That meant he had to be stationed in that doorway no later than eight o'clock, perhaps even a bit sooner.

For fifteen minutes he would be standing there in a static state. This was it, then—his life crystallized to a few minutes of the kind of crime he abhorred.

* * *

The young man standing before the night-deposit chute of the Pasadena Trust Bank went rigid when he felt the pistol barrel jab into his lower spine. The man took the grocery bag out of his arms and told Ori to lie down on the pavement of the entryway. There was a second man watching him from a parked automobile with another pistol; if Joe Ori moved so much as a muscle in the next five minutes, he would be shot and killed.

There wasn't much Joe Ori could do but comply with the instructions. He crooked his left arm so that one eye could view the dial of his wristwatch, as he heard the man who had taken his grocery bag run off.

That was just the thing about those damn meetings, Ori reflected as he lay waiting for the

five minutes to pass. They extolled the beauty of revolution, they paid fiery homage to the great revolutionaries of the past, they filled your arms with those damn pamphlets and they they shoved you out onto the street with the vague instructions to hit the establishment where the establishment was most vulnerable.

So you spent the day wandering around with the damn thing tucked under your arm, looking for the establishment's vulnerability so you could make your statement, create a symbol. And then, when you found it, some punk with a pistol and a two-bit plan heisted the damn one-minute time-activated bomb right out your hands. . . .



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APRIL, 1977

THE COUNTERFEIT FRAME

Ex-cop Pete Merrick took up true crime writing to make a living. Then he discovered his new way of life had suddenly turned into a way of death.

by T. A. MEEKS

PETE MERRICK WAS standing at his fourth floor walk-up window staring morosely down toward the darkening street when the telephone *brred* into action. His leg muscles were knotted from a four-hour stint at the typewriter and he stamped the floor to relieve them as he moved toward the instrument.

"Yeah? Merrick here."

"This the Pete Merrick that's writing the stories?" a fuzzy voice inquired.

"Yes, it is. Take your hand-kerchief off the mouthpiece and let's talk," Merrick replied.

"You don't need to know who I am," the muffled words continued, "but I've got a message for you."

"Lay it on me, then," Merrick cut in impatiently.

"The big man has just put out a contract on you, so take care." The line clicked dead and Merrick found himself holding the silent receiver at arm's length, staring at it with an unconscious sort of fascination. Then he moved automatically to the battered old coffee pot on the hot plate in the cubicle kitchen and began manufacturing a fresh supply of black liquid.

After a while sitting at his desk, a hand curled around a fresh mug of inky coffee, he studied the closing paragraphs of his story. He had done everything except name names in his



three previous articles. It figured that Big Augie would take steps to silence him soon, and now it had come.

After his wife's sudden death two years before and his resignation from the force, his

friends at Headquarters, especially Sam Tolliver, had done everything possible to help Merrick pull out of his soul-searing depression. When Pete bought an old second hand typewriter and tried to write

mystery stories with a police background, Sam Tolliver had encouraged him to try and try again. When Pete's money was almost exhausted, Sam had steered him into a part-time job at the police car pool yard.

Then the first break had come. Pete was approached by a local publisher who wanted a professional exposé dredged up out of the sordid sewage of the city underworld. There was no problem about an investigator's license or the permit to carry his old service .357 Magnum.

Now, with the last page of the final article in his typewriter, Pete Merrick had been put on notice of death. There was nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. So to hell with it, he thought, flopping down on the old couch without undressing.

The following day, Merrick had an appointment with his publisher at ten. Awakening late, he made a dash for his shaving kit. A half hour later, jockeying his old sedan through the slushy streets, Pete found himself almost unconsciously screening through the swirling throng of pedestrians for a face, any face that might belong to a hit man, a hit man he had probably never seen before.

He eased the car to a halt at a traffic light, scanning the crowd along the curb. Suddenly, through a momentary break in

the crush, he saw two faces, split-second glimpses, two men side by side, standing in a dingy little hole-in-the-wall shop doorway.

As a blaring horn prodded him forward, Pete catalogued one of the faces he had just seen as Johnny Conway, a technician who worked in the police lab. The man had been hired shortly before Pete resigned and the two were barely nodding acquaintances. The figure standing beside Conway in the doorway, however, was more puzzling. There was something vaguely familiar about the stooped shoulders, the shock of white hair, yet Merrick could not place him. But the doorway fronted a little cubbyhole gun shop. A small, weathered sign clutched against the brickwork by rusty nails proclaimed this fact.

Later, when Merrick reached the front door of his walk-up after the session with his publisher, he was in a foul mood. The fellow was proving difficult about the final installment. He was insisting on more detail, was all but demanding a definite description of Big Augie, himself. Sam Tolliver was waiting at the foot of the long stairway.

"Thought you might be lying low, or have you heard yet?" Sam barked.

"Yeah, I heard," Pete retorted.

As the two men plodded upward, Sam Tolliver outlined the rumors running up and down the grapevine.

"You've got to believe this contract is for real," Tolliver cautioned as he opened the door and swept the room with a glance.

"Could be," Merrick replied, attacking the empty coffee pot with a restrained ferocity, "and he does have a good reason to have me put away."

After a while the old pot began to bubble with a muted ecstasy. Pete stared across the table and locked eyes with the detective. Both men broke into a mutual grin of understanding.

"You've been in spots before," Tolliver observed.

"True," Pete answered, beginning to pour fresh coffee.

As the two sat hunched over their mugs, sipping the fragrant brew and kicking the facts around, Merrick broached the subject of an informer in the Department.

"You hate like hell to even think about having a rat in your nest," Tolliver said at last with a bitter edge in his voice.

"Sure," Pete agreed, "but the evidence points that way."

Tolliver checked his watch and swore, heading for the

door. Then, as the detective paused, Pete described his brief glimpse of the two faces he had seen.

"I'm certain one of them was Conway of the lab but I can't place the old white-haired one. I've seen that face somewhere, though."

"Buddy, you've seen a lot of faces, everywhere," Tolliver flung over his shoulder. "Be careful," he added by way of farewell.

The week that followed was sheer frustration for Pete Merrick. Then, Saturday night, about nine, the break came. Old Punchy, one of Pete's most dependable stoolies, called and set up a meeting at the corner of Sixth and Water Street. He had a hot tip. With only minutes to spare before rendezvous time, Pete slid through the thinning herd of humanity and approached the appointed corner.

A car nearby backfired with a sharp report. As Pete's head jerked sideways with an involuntary reflex, his glance raked a figure with snow-white hair passing quickly in the crowd. Pete stifled an impulse to turn and follow but then the elusive impression that had been bugging him clicked into place. Damn it all, one of the man's ears was longer than the other. He kept churning this strange

face through his mind's eye as he waited impatiently for Punchy but the stoolie failed to appear.

At 9:30 sharp Pete Merrick muttered a string of variegated oaths and started walking swiftly back down Sixth toward his parking spot. As he crossed the mouth of the first alley cutting off the lighted street the report of a heavy caliber shot lanced out of the darkness. Pete threw himself sideways in a dive toward a nearby doorway. Then he grinned sheepishly and replaced his half-drawn gun in its holster.

You damned idiot, he reminded himself, you never hear the one that gets you. It was undoubtedly a big gun, he thought, as he continued on his way. His wrist watch showed 9:31 and he filed the fact away in his mind as routine, wondering if Punchy's call had been a trap.

TWO DAYS LATER, the sky caved in on Pete Merrick. Sam Tolliver's mighty pounding on the door jolted him awake from a catnap. The detective entered and began to pace the floor with savage, pent-up energy. Abruptly turning he stabbed a forefinger into the air like a switch-blade knife. "Man, they have got you shot down, but good." The detective's words

The detective's words lashed out at him like a striking snake.

"What the hell for?" Pete demanded.

Sam Tolliver slumped in the easy chair. "The young D. A. has you hooked for the murder of Danny Deaver in that alley," he stated.

"He's what?" Pete's voice was raspy and the short hairs on his neck began to crawl.

"The Captain just clued me in," Sam began. "Look, Pete, some dude heard a shot and called in and they found Danny slumped against a couple of garbage cans; you must have seen the papers. The slug had bored through Danny and one can, and was lodged in the second one. The slug was a .357, Pete."

Merrick stood still, frowning. "Yeah, go on," he said, his voice tight and controlled.

"Well," Sam continued, "they have a witness that places you on the corner a half block away at about nine thirty. The way the D. A. sees it, you had a motive, you were at the scene and your gun is the right caliber. He figures that you must have known Deaver was one of Augie's hit men and this would be your motive. The Captain asked me to bring in your .357, Pete, to fire a test round." The detective glanced up at the other's

tense face, then looked away in embarrassment.

"You've already got a slug fired from my Magnum," Pete broke in. "Remember when that new Police Commissioner got that weirdo idea about having everybody on the force fire a test slug and file it in the lab with a little I. D. card?"

"Sure, we still have it but the D. A. wants a new slug fired from your gun by our Ballistics boys. Sorry, Pete."

"Don't let it bug you, buddy, it's not your fault." Pete Merrick stalked, stiff-legged, to the night table and returned with his service revolver, holding it out butt-first toward the detective.

Tolliver came to his feet and moved toward the door. "I'll keep you posted, fellow, if I can, and when they test-fire this gun the D.A. will really look stupid."

Pete managed a crooked smile. "Thanks for everything, Sam, but I didn't gun that hood down. I never even saw him."

"I believe you," Sam Tolliver flung over his shoulder, "but somebody has gone to a lot of trouble to finger you."

The day following Tolliver's visit, Pete was sitting at the typewriter trying to phrase the last few paragraphs when a sharp rapping at the door brought him out of his chair.

"Pete Merrick? It's Jimmy Dranow here. Open up." The voice cut through the door like a buzz saw. Pete checked through the peephole and then opened the door to the Homicide detective.

"Come on in, Jimmy," he said, giving his visitor a half-grin of welcome.

"Pete Merrick, you're under arrest on suspicion of murder and anything you say . . ." The man's voice trailed off as Pete raised an impatient hand.

"I know my rights, Jimmy. Save your breath, but what about the test slug?"

"They matched, Pete. The murder slug was fired from your gun. Let's go." The detective's eyes roved over the room. "Get your topcoat. I'm double-parked down there."

"They couldn't match," Pete ground out, "because I didn't shoot that hood." He walked slowly to the closet and took down his windbreaker, feeling in the pocket for an extra pack of cigarettes.

"You want to argue with Ballistics?" Dranow barked. "Then you can do it in the Captain's office. Let's move."

As they left the apartment, the detective threw a hard glance at Pete. "You wouldn't do anything crazy like trying a break, would you?"

"Hell, no," Pete answered

curtly. "Why should I? I'm not guilty of anything."

The trip to Headquarters was made in silence. Sam Tolliver and the Captain were waiting, fidgeting and uneasy.

"Would you like to make a statement, Pete?" The Captain spoke the old familiar question softly, almost pleadingly.

"Yes," Pete responded, under-scoring each word, "I didn't shoot him, but I can't explain the slug matching my gun."

"Take him down and book him," the Captain commanded Dranow. "Suspicion of murder."

IT TOOK THE combined efforts and resources of Sam Tolliver and Pete's publisher to convince Friendly Frankovitch, a wary bail bondsman who had known Merrick for several years, that he should post the necessary bond. But by noon the following day Pete was temporarily a free man and as Sam drove him back to his apartment they half-heartedly attacked the problem which appeared to have no solution. Ballistics simply did not make mistakes—still, Pete was calling their expert a liar.

Sam braked to a halt at a red light and Pete's half-closed eyes, raking the street with little interest, suddenly riveted on a shop front. "Look, Sam," he ordered, "there's the little gun

shop where I saw Conway and the old white-haired man together. And did I tell you I saw him again near the corner where Punchy stood me up the night of the murder?"

"No, you didn't," Sam began to move on a green light, then he faced his passenger with excitement beginning to build up in his eyes "but now I know who your old mystery man is. The old white-haired dude who runs that hole-in-the-wall is an ex-con, Whitey De Jong, has a record long as a police blotter.

"He's an odd looking old guy with one long ear and he has spent more time in than out—forgery, tampering with gun serial numbers, counterfeiting, you name it and he's done it if it's illegal. I've heard he's one of the top three phony money engravers in the country. They say his plates will turn out the queer green that make the "T" boys see red."

"My old white-hair has one big ear all right but how come he's-out now and running a gun shop?" Pete broke in.

"Well, I think he's on parole and gun repair is the only legal trade he knows. They go to any lengths to get an ex-con earning a living outside the walls."

"Sam, something is bothering me about this old fellow and seeing Conway at his shop just doesn't make sense. Could

Conway be ripping off guns from the old storage room down at the lab and selling them to Whitey De Jong?"

"Could be," the detective replied cautiously. "Anything's possible and I've heard Conway likes the ponies."

Without another word passing between them Sam wheeled the car into a cross street and began to drive back toward the gun shop of Whitey De Jong.

As the two entered the dingy little shop and leaned against a sway-backed counter, the hunched old man with a jeweler's loupe jutting crazily over one eye socket, looked up and squinted. He had been peering into the inner mechanism of a tiny automatic handgun and, as he turned toward the counter, a nervous tic began to twitch a corner of his mouth.

Sam Tolliver engaged the gunsmith in a round of small talk while Pete's eyes swept over every visible object in the room. A work bench flanked by several racks of tools occupied the cramped space behind the counter while an assortment of hand-guns hung suspended from a peg board on the side wall.

A door at the end of the counter revealed a small inner room meagerly curtained by an old, tattered blanket. Through

a slit in this covering Pete could barely distinguish a cot piled with jumbled clothing and assorted bedding. Hanging on the wall behind the cot was a series of what appeared to be photo blowups of some sort.

As Tolliver continued their conversation Whitey grew progressively more tense and edgy. When Pete nudged the detective and suggested they leave, Tolliver half-turned toward the door, his eyes roving across the gun display on the wall. A revolver near the top attracted his attention and he swung back toward the gunsmith. "There's a nice weapon, Whitey," he nodded toward the rack.

"Let's see the .357 Mag up there, just for a minute."

"What do you want to see it for?" Whitey blurted, as he passed the gun to Tolliver. "You've already got a .357."

The detective took the gun and, turning it over and over several times, examined the serial number and sniffed the cylinder noisily. "Whitey, you shouldn't put a gun for sale without cleaning it up first. This gun has been fired since it was cleaned last."

"It couldn't have," the man gasped. "I cleaned it up good after I traded for it and it hasn't been out of the shop since."

"If you say so," Tolliver answered mildly, returning the gun into a hand that shook. The two men turned to leave and the ex-con's voice stopped them at the door.

"Don't try to hang anything on me now, fellows, please. I've been clean ever since my last stretch. I can't go back, it would kill me." The words faded out on a note of utter hopelessness.

"We'll see you around," Tolliver flung at the old man and closed the door gently.

"You couldn't really smell anything on the gun, could you?" Pete asked as they approached their car.

"No, just fishing," Tolliver replied, "but something bugs me about Old Whitey and I can't say what."

As the car pulled to a halt before Merrick's door, Tolliver placed a firm hand on the other's shoulder and spoke rapidly and with vehemence. "Pete, somebody has a frame around you big enough to hold the Mona Lisa and I'm certain that the tag on it reads, 'With best wishes from Big Augie.'"

"Thanks for your confidence," Pete replied as he slammed the door.

"I can't explain any of it, but I'm trying." The detective essayed a grin as he slipped the car into gear. "Go up there and

lock your door and get some sleep."

Merrick raised a hand in salute and then turned toward those hateful four flights of stairs and the bitter loneliness of an empty apartment. A thought wormed into his mind, unbidden, as he trudged upward. What would Anne say if she were still alive? Would she believe his story?

Merrick entered the cold apartment and headed for the stagnant coffee pot and prepared for a long night of pacing the floor. A gray dawn was seeping under the window shade before he finally flopped down on the couch, pulled up a blanket and surrendered to utter exhaustion.

But a grim smile crinkled at the corners of his mouth as he closed his eyes. He had the thing whipped at last. He knew exactly how it could have been done. All he lacked was proof, any shred of proof. He must wait on Sam Tolliver to produce that.

The next three days crawled by on leaden feet, minute by minute, tedious hour by hour. When Tolliver finally arrived about dusk of the third day, Pete could read both excitement and satisfaction in his old friend's face. The detective straddled a chair and grinned up at Pete.

"Well, buddy, a helluva lot's happened since I dropped you off the other day but the Captain kept me mum." Sam held out a hand for a coffee mug. "Before I begin I'd like to hear your version of the caper. You must have one."

"Yeah, I have," Pete answered thoughtfully, "and this is the way it figures." He slid into a chair across the table from the detective. "Big Augie had to get me off his back but if he had me gunned down suspicion would point directly to him, so he doped out a scheme that would put me behind bars instead." Pete caused to light a cigarette.

"So far, so good," Sam prompted, "go on."

"Well, the mob spread the word that I was to be hit. Then Punchy lured me to the right spot with that phone call. He's been known to work for Augie before and I'll bet my last dollar that Punchy is the D. A.'s witness that puts me at the murder scene at nine thirty P.M."

"True, Punchy is your pigeon," Sam grunted.

"As to Dan Deaver," Pete continued, "somebody shot this slob with a .357 Mag at some other location after forcing him to stand up against two garbage cans. Then they brought the body along with the two



cans and set them up in the alley in the proper position to make it look like he was shot on the spot. After they got the props all set up they fired a shot into the air from a heavy gun and split."

When Pete rose to refill their mugs, the detective spoke and his tone was quizzical. "You've overlooked the main sticker, Pete! How did the slug with your gun markings get into the trash barrel?"

"Sam, there's only one possible way I can figure it. The slug Homicide dug out of the barrel was the one that was on file in the police lab. Somebody lifted this sample from the lab and probably substituted another in its place. Then this person gave the genuine slug from my gun to Augie's people and when they shot Deaver they retrieved the bullet that killed him from the garbage and substituted my slug in its place."

"And who do you think switched slugs in the lab?" Sam asked.

"My bet would be on Conway."

"And you would be right." Sam Tolliver now took the floor and began to unfold his bizarre story with obvious relish. He fired a cigaret and squinted through the curling smoke.

"Big Augie dreamed up this

scenario for the reasons you just mentioned. His cast included Conway, who had been betting the ponies and couldn't pay—Old Whitey, the gunsmith and engraver, whom he threatened to frame back into stir—and, of course, Punchy who needs his supply of horse to keep going. But the main star was Dan Deaver and he played his part for keeps."

"Yeah, I knew Punchy had been a mainliner for years," Pete interjected, "and I figured he made that first call to me about the hit contract."

Tolliver ignored the interruption. "But you had no way of knowing the real Dick Tracy angle of this setup, Pete, and you're not going to believe it."

"After I dropped you off the other night, I began to dig deeper into this Whitey and Conway hookup and it worried me. I didn't realize how near Whitey was to cracking wide open but just on a hunch I dropped back to his shop about eleven P.M. and routed him out of bed. Well, I took a shot in the dark and told him Conway had been singing loud and clear, naming names and dates, the works."

"The old man came unglued and began to spill the whole bucket of worms. I took him down town and for the vague suggestion of a 'maybe so' sus-

pended sentence he wrapped up all the loose ends for us."

Tolliver fell silent, savoring the suspense building up toward the flash point in his friend.

"But the slug, damn it, Sam, the slug," Merrick's eyes were like live coals as he leaned across the table. "Did they discover the phony bullet Conway planted in the lab as a substitute for mine?"

The detective held up a hand. "Pete, remember that Big Augie was playing these poor bastards like puppets on strings, and he gave all the orders. First, Conway and Whitey met Deaver in one of Augie's warehouses, lined him up in front of the garbage cans and shot him once with a .357 mag, the same gun we spotted in the gun shop.

"Then they dug out the spent slug and substituted the bullet they had in their possession. They hauled the two cans and the body to the alley location as you have already doped out. Conway waited in the van while Whitey cased the corner where you were supposed to show. The whole operation hinged on exact timing. Whitey didn't intend for you to spot him but he had no way of knowing you recognized him, anyway.

"After you arrived they

placed everything in proper position. When they had the props all set up, Conway drove off in the van and Whitey fired a shot in the air as he saw you cross the alley entrance and then high-tailed it for his shop, where he cleaned the Mag and hung it on the rack."

"And the bullet from my gun?" Pete begged as Sam paused.

"Pete, recall when you spotted Conway and Whitey at the door of the gun shop? Well, Conway was picking up your lab specimen slug from Whitey to return it to its proper place in the police lab. He had stolen your bullet with your .357 markings on it and left it with Whitey, who is probably the most expert engraver the counterfeiting fraternity has ever produced. Whitey took your slug and engraved the ballistic markings on an unfired bullet, turned out an exact duplicate which even fooled our Ballistics experts."

"He did what?" Pete croaked in absolute incredulity. "That's impossible, it's never been done before."

"Probably true," Sam shot back, "but any craftsman who can duplicate the intricate shadings on a fifty-dollar bill as expertly as Whitey can do most anything with metal. Just think about it. Visualize the de-

licate tools Whitey uses and how good he is with them."

Pete Merrick uncoiled from his chair and began circling the room like a caged animal. "He must have been using blowups like we glimpsed in the back room and working under high magnification." His voice was tense with excitement. "But what went wrong, Sam?"

"Just one of those little accidents that usually trip up the best of criminal schemes. If you hadn't just happened to spot Whitey's face and funny ears from an old mug shot you once saw, we would have never been alerted about the old engraver.

"Incidentally, we have Whitey and Punchy but Conway has disappeared into thin air, gone, evaporated. His wife claims he hasn't been home for two days. Augie probably took him out of circulation for keeps." The detective rose and began fumbling with his top coat.

"Thanks for everything,

Sam," Merrick said simply, thrusting out a hand.

"It was almost a pleasure, old buddy," the other grinned. "When you drop around to the Captain's office to pick up your Mag get him to show you the three slugs. He's keeping them in his desk for curiosities. Ballistics swears all three came from your gun but we know only two of them did." Sam moved toward the door.

"Well, what do you know?" Pete Merrick had followed the detective and the two stood smiling for a moment, probing each other's face. "I turned up in a genuine counterfeit frame made by an expert engraver but it will furnish me with a picture for Part Five of my crime series and another paycheck from my publisher."

"Be seeing you," Sam Tolliver slipped out into the hall with a wave of the hand.

Pete Merrick stalked to his typewriter and grinned down at the machine. "Let's go baby."



PETER'S SECOND WIFE

by
**JOANN S.
SCHEB**



Peter Morley gave his wives all that money can buy—but for some reason first Elaine and now Mario took to drink.

MARLO MORLEY STOPPED by the palm tree at the elevator, balanced the bag of groceries on one shapely hip, thumbed the button for "up" and waited impatiently. Peter's car hadn't been in its slot, so she knew he wasn't home yet, but she wanted to be upstairs and out of her tennis clothes, bathed

and beautiful and especially sexy-looking before he got there. Tonight was a special night.

Besides, Peter didn't like her to stop at the grocery store in tennis clothes. Peter was very proper.

The elevator came and, ignoring the bulging eyes of a young

man getting off, Marlo entered the cab and pushed the button for the ninth floor. The telephone started ringing while she was still trying to fit the key into the lock of her condominium.

"I've been trying to call you all afternoon," he said, and she felt her heart skip a beat. He hadn't forgotten. He was going to wish her a happy anniversary. He was going to invite her out for dinner.

"I've been playing tennis," she told him. She had won. She felt wonderful. She wished he would ask, but he didn't.

"I wanted to tell you that I have an appointment to show a house at seven," he said. "I'll just grab a bite to eat at the cafeteria."

"Oh!" she said. He had forgotten. "I was hoping—"

The disappointment must have seeped into her voice because he interrupted her. "I didn't forget our anniversary," he said. "We'll celebrate tomorrow night. All right?"

"All right," she said, but this time, she made no real attempt to sound cheerful.

Peter cradled the phone. She would begin to drink, he supposed. Why did he always get saddled with women destined to become alcoholics?

His first wife had been that way. She had started to

drink—or at least he had become aware of her drinking—in the third year of their marriage.

Elaine had been a beautiful woman. She was tall, brown-haired, beautifully proportioned. She had been intelligent, too. They married right out of college, and in the early years, she was both a comfort and a joy. Peter had put her up on a pedestal, had never let her work, not even in his own office. He didn't believe in working wives.

He supposed he would never understand it. Elaine had led the ideal life. He provided her with everything—washer, dryer, dishwasher, color television—and asked almost nothing of her in return. Because he had never really enjoyed entertaining or being entertained, there was very little required of her. Their house had been large but, since they had no children, she had little trouble keeping it.

All he wanted was a clean house to come home to and a hot meal when he wasn't too busy to eat it. Why, then, had she begun to drink?

Peter never drank, himself. It bothered his ulcer, and he had never developed a taste for it, anyway. He gathered up his papers and left the office, trying to remember when he first

became aware that Elaine had an alcohol problem.

He remembered arriving home fairly early a few times and finding Marilyn Cramer there, having cocktails with Elaine. He had never liked Marilyn; but he said nothing, was polite and civil and then got back to his den to work while he waited patiently for his dinner.

It was later, he remembered, that Elaine had begun drinking alone and, toward the end, she was drunk almost every night when he got home from work.

Once, and only once, he said something about it, and she shrugged her lovely shoulders.

"You like to work," she said, "I like to drink."

What was that supposed to mean?

He hadn't really consciously planned to kill her. In fact, now that it was four years since it had happened, he wasn't even certain that he had. She had been drinking heavily, had stepped too close to the basement stairs. He remembered bumping into her—but, he told himself, he was certain it hadn't been on purpose. . . .

MARLO DIDN'T use a jigger. She hardly ever did any more. She knew by instinct how much bourbon to pour into the bottom of the glass, how much ice and

water to add. The color was perfect, the taste, divine.

She unpacked the groceries, put the steaks in the freezer. She looked for a hard boiled egg, then decided she wasn't hungry. She strolled into the living room and sat down.

The view out over the Gulf was lovely. A sailboat glided by. She could make out two figures on it—a boy and a girl. The sun was setting behind them.

She thought about the gun in Peter's desk. Two months ago, he had brought it home and shown her how to use it.

"But why?" she had said, "I hate guns."

"Just a precaution," he told her. "You're here alone a lot, and there've been so many robberies out here at the beach."

Reluctantly, she listened to his instructions, said, "Okay, now. Unload it."

"But why? It won't do you any good if it isn't loaded."

"I couldn't shoot anyone anyway."

"Of course you could, if your own life were in danger."

"I don't like it, Peter. I'd probably end up killing myself."

"Nonsense! I've just shown you exactly how to use it."

"But accidents do happen, you know."

In the end, Peter had un-

loaded the gun. But first he insisted that she learn how to put the bullets in, herself.

TWO MONTHS, Peter thought as he sat down to his cafeteria dinner. That should be long enough for any lush to decide to kill herself.

He had considered divorcing her, but he knew that she would never let him go. Why should she? She had everything going for her—a lovely apartment, a good looking and successful husband, plenty of time and money to spend any way she wanted. From her point of view, divorce would be absolutely stupid. From his—why should he pay alimony to a lush?

She was depressed. He could tell that. She was drinking more and talking less. When he bought the gun and showed her how to use it, he'd had a vague idea that she would probably use it on herself.

He decided, as he paid the cashier and left the restaurant, to go and meet his clients, if Marlo hadn't killed herself by the time he got home, he could always clean the gun, and the gun could go off. After all, as Marlo herself had said, accidents do happen. And, as the police had said the other time, alcoholics are accident prone.

It had been dark for a long

time, but Marlo hadn't turned on any lights in the apartment. She sat on the couch, looking out at the stars and the Gulf.

Peter had not forgotten their anniversary. She told herself that should make her happy.

But it didn't.

It would have been better if he had forgotten. By remembering and making an appointment with a client anyway, he had only underlined the fact that he cared far less for her than he did for his business.

She was depressed. She knew it. She drew in a deep breath and for the first time allowed herself to wonder whether Peter's first wife had really fallen down those stairs.

Marlo held her glass up to the window, and looked through it into the starry sky. It was her original drink, and it was still half full. She got up and went into the kitchen and, slowly and methodically, poured it down the drain.

She went into the den and got out Peter's gun. Carefully, she loaded it and went back to the living room and sat down on the couch, this time turned so that she was facing the door. When he opened it, he would be silhouetted against the light in the corridor.

After all, there *had* been many recent robberies here. And accidents do happen.

sixty seconds delay

When Eddie tightens his finger on the trigger, he had no idea he was exactly one minute out of synch.

by **MICK
MAHONEY**

O'HAGAN SNAPPED THE SMALL automatic pistol from his belt and laid it on the counter beside a jar of mustard. He rolled the flip-top off of a can of beer with a sharp click, took a long swallow, then proceeded to pile slices of ham on a thick slab of rye bread. He carried the plate of beans, sandwich, pickles and potato chips over to the kitchen table. It was a hot night. He went back for his beer, switched on the radio and sat down to eat. His wife, Joyce, had gone to Boston for her niece's wedding. O'Hagan enjoyed the solitude.

"...continued warm and humid tonight and tomorrow. Daytime highs around ninety; lows in the high seventies. And we've got a ten-percent chance



of precipitation through Thursday," the radio was saying. "Repeating the top stories of the hour . . ."

O'Hagan went back to the refrigerator to get some of the corn relish he liked.

" . . . and the Dow-Jones industrials took another plunge today, closing at . . ."

Joyce kept the kitchen spotless. O'Hagan liked it that way. He looked at his reflection in the black picture window.

" . . . stay tuned now for Listeners' Line, the program that allows you, the listener, to talk back to your radio. But first a word . . ."

O'Hagan was a big-boned man, solid and muscular. His thin sandy hair was laid straight back across his scalp. He had wide red cheeks, a small but not weak jaw, and deep set, unexpressive eyes.

" . . . remember that Federal Home Finance could be the answer. We hate to say no." A catchy organ melody came on and O'Hagan turned up the volume. He liked Listeners' Line. Sometimes they got real crackpots on . . .

" . . . to Listeners' Line. I'm your host, Lou Snead. And I have with me in the studio our guest for this evening, Mr. Ray Walther. Mr. Walther is a probation officer and the author of the controversial book, 'A Third

Chance', and is one of our leading experts on prisons and penal reform. I'd like to welcome Mr. Walther here tonight. I'm sure we'll have a lively and informative session. Mr. Walther, welcome aboard."

"Thank you, Lou. I'm glad to . . ."

O'Hagan got up and took another beer from the refrigerator.

" . . . later part of the program. Before we start taking calls, though, I'd like to remind everyone that we are on a sixty seconds taped delay. So when you call up and get on the air you must turn your radio down. Otherwise, you'll be listening for yourself to come on and you're likely to get very confused. So keep that in mind. It's something we have to remind folks of every night. Also try to make your remarks as concise as possible, so we can get as many listeners on the air as possible. Now that number to call again is . . ."

O'Hagan finished his sandwich, took his plate to the sink and rinsed it. He sat down again in front of his beer, leaned back and lit a cigarette.

" . . . to take our first caller. Hello, you're on Listeners' Line."

"Hello? Lou?"

"That's right. You're on the air."

"Yeah, well, I just wanted to ask Mr. Walther there if he doesn't think we've been doing a little too much to take care of the criminal and not enough for, you know, the average guy that's getting mugged and all that you hear about all the time?"

"Mr. Walther, would you like to comment on that?"

"Yes, Lou. The caller has certainly raised one of the fundamental questions at issue these days. But as I say in my book, most of the decisions of the courts having to do with privacy and a fair trial have been designed to protect the ordinary citizen who might be falsely accused. They do not prevent an actual criminal from being brought to justice. They have been necessary to protect the individual from the powers of government. Now under the system I have proposed"

O'Hagan swore softly to himself. Writing a book is easy enough, he thought. That guy ought to be out in the streets and seeing what was really going on. He began to leaf through a magazine, ignoring the radio.

" . . . what the caller must keep in mind," Walther was saying some minutes later, "is that the convict is a very complicated individual. He exists outside the regular framework

of society and is therefore"

O'Hagan lit another cigarette and began to look up the television listings in the paper. He was about to switch the radio off when a coarse voice, louder than the others, came on.

"Ray? That you? You told me you were going to be on this talk show, remember? This is Eddie. I'm in real The voice was replaced by the organ music that was substituted when someone swore or mentioned a product by name on the air. O'Hagan decided to wait and see what was up. Two minutes later the voice came back on.

" . . . telling you I want everybody to hear this. I'm on the top floor of the Grant building, and they're going to kill me. I want this on the air now. Come on. Sammy's in the next room, dead. He killed a guard. It wasn't me. But I've got a woman here and I'll blast her if you don't put me back on."

"Okay, Eddie," Lou said. "You're on now. Just wait for the delay to come around. You've got a radio there?"

"Yeah—yeah, okay, I hear it. Now listen, Ray, I don't want to hurt anyone. You know that. But they want to kill me."

"Who's trying to kill you, Eddie?"

"The cops, man. They're all around here. So don't cut me off

again or this lady here has had it. I want the whole world to hear this. I don't care about . . . I mean Sammy took one in the gut. He's right out there . . ."

O'Hagan turned up his radio and listened with interest, stroking his chin and smoking. After a few minutes it became apparent what was going on. One of the cons that Walther handled as a probation officer had gotten pinned down in a stickup and was holding a woman hostage. He probably figured he could use a grandstand play like this to get some kind of sympathy, O'Hagan thought, have everybody in the city listening to him.

O'Hagan's phone rang.

"Yeah . . . Yeah, I got it on now . . . Sure, I'll go straight from here . . . Boy, I guess so . . . You ain't kidding."

O'Hagan took the automatic from the counter and snapped it onto his belt. From a closet, he took a vinyl case the length of a rifle, a pair of binoculars, also cased, and a brown canvas bag full of sand. He clipped his badge over the pocket of his shortsleeve shirt and started out. He came back to pick up the transistor radio Joyce listened to when she was sunbathing. Then he got into his car.

Half an hour later, O'Hagan was squatting behind a low

wall on the roof of a factory building. The sandbag lay on top of the wall, a smooth hollow in its center. Across the hollow rested a sleek semi-automatic rifle, mounted with a large scope. O'Hagan cradled the stock casually in his right arm and held binoculars to his eyes with his left. The transistor radio, a walkie-talkie and a box of cartridges rested on the still warm tar beside him.

Through the binoculars, O'Hagan could peer across a small parking lot into the Grant building. The office he was watching was lit by fluorescent lights, the parking lot by police floodlights. Inside the office, a swarthy, dark haired man stood with his back to a filing cabinet, facing the window.

He held a telephone receiver in one hand, a large black revolver in the other. A fat woman in a green dress stood directly in front of him, moving her eyes back and forth and licking her lips repeatedly. On either side of the window, police officers wearing flak jackets and carrying shotguns crouched.

O'Hagan normally worked the Burglary and Loft Section of the detective bureau. But since he'd been the top marksman of his unit in Korea and had kept in practice as a

regular deer hunter, he was also assigned to a special hostage task force.

This squad was assembled whenever a situation arose, whether a family quarrel, political hijacking or botched robbery such as this one, where a hostage was involved. Some of the officers specialized in psychology, trying to negotiate with the criminal, calm him down, talk him into giving up.

O'Hagan's skills were called for only as a last resort. He was glad of that. No matter how good a shot you are, no matter how sophisticated your weapon, there was always a chance of hitting the hostage or letting the criminal get off a few rounds before finally killing him. Whenever there was shooting, there was a big risk.

Down in the street, to his right, O'Hagan could see a large crowd pushing against police barricades, swept alternately by red and white lights that revolved on the tops of the mass of patrol cars. They had heard on the radio about the payroll robbery that had been thwarted by two guards, the shootout that had left a guard and one of the robbers dead. They had listened to the pleading, the ranting, the shouting, the swearing that had gone on for nearly an hour. They had heard the terrified secretary

whimper into the phone, the cornered convict demand that his parole officer fix up a deal, claiming he was afraid of dying, afraid of prison. They had heard and they had come downtown to see the action. All very dramatic, O'Hagan thought, and very deadly.

So far, the situation remained stable. O'Hagan was relaxed and alert, slowly chewing gum, breathing deeply, stalking. He had to use his judgment. The picture could change instantly. He watched the man talking, wild eyed, into the phone. A familiar voice came on the radio.

"Eddie, this is Lieutenant Thornton. I just want to tell you a little bit about . . ."

"No!" the voice cackled. "No cops. I don't want to talk to no cops. Ray, do you hear me? I'll kill this woman, and I'll kill myself. You better play straight with me . . ."

"Okay, Eddie," Walther came back on. "Calm down. Lieutenant Thornton wants to help you get out of that mess you're in. You know you'll have to talk to . . ."

"No cops, I said. I'm warning . . ."

O'Hagan had put the binoculars down and was now sitting, one knee supporting his elbow, gazing through the scope, through the window, placing

the crossed hair lines on the man's temple, resting his finger delicately on the trigger.

In the office, the dark-haired man now wrapped his left arm around the woman's neck, held the receiver with his left hand and pointed the gun toward her head with his right. He was shouting. A wave of static swept over O'Hagan's radio. Without taking his eye from the scope he reached over to adjust the tuning. The voice came back clearly.

"... trusted you, Ray. And you let me down. You people hear that? You trust somebody, and they let you down."

"No, Eddie, I haven't let you down. I won't now. You have to give us a chance to help you out of this..."

"Shut up! I don't want any more of your lies. Do you hear me? Do *all* of you hear me? Are *you all* listening? I've had enough lies, enough tricks. Now you're all going to pay because I'm going to kill this woman and *you're all* responsible. *You're all* making me pull the trigger. I'm going to *kill* her!"

Through the scope, O'Hagan watched the man, still with the phone to his head, push the fat woman away and lower his revolver toward her in an arc. Two shots, less than a second apart, made two small holes in the glass.

One bullet pierced Eddie's forehead, the other pounded him in the chest as he fell back out of sight. The scene burst into a riot of activity. The fat woman screamed hysterically, and policemen swarmed into the office. O'Hagan reached into his pocket for a cigaret.

Then he froze, listening. "Don't be a sucker, Eddie," Walther's voice continued on the radio. "There's no point. You've got a sister. How would you like it if somebody was holding your sister with a gun to her head? What the hell kind of trick is that? You're not going to kill anyone, Eddie. You're not that stupid. You'll get a fair shake, I promise you. Trust me, Eddie."

"I... I don't know," said the voice of the dead man. "I don't know what the hell I'm doing, Ray. It's just that I'm scared as hell. And..."

"First, let that woman go, Eddie. Nobody's going to hurt you. Put down the gun and let her go. You won't get hurt."

"Okay. What the hell. Yeah, you go on. Get out of here. Okay, Ray, I'm going to put the rod down. I've..."

The radio went dead with a crack. Then the organ music came on, and O'Hagan remembered the taped delay. He lit his cigaret and took a long drag.

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